

B.B. 36/322

The Beauty and Benefit of early Piety;

Represented in several

SERMONS,

PREACHED TO

YOUNG PEOPLE

ON

NEW YEARS DAYS,

And published out of compassion to
the rising generation.

By DAVID JENNINGS.

*Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom;
— she shall give to thine head an ornament of
grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.
PROV. iv. 7, 9.*

*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost,
and is found, LUKE xv. 24.*

The SECOND EDITION

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TO THE
Church and Congregation,

Which I serve in the Ministry of
the Gospel.

My dear Friends,

I Account it, and shall always esteem it, as one very considerable mixture of mercy in my late and long sickness, by which I was rendered incapable of my publick ministry amongst you, for so many weeks together, that yet I was not altogether laid aside from the service of your souls; but had then opportunity, in the intervals of the distemper, to gratify a desire which several of you had expressed, and to endeavour something for the spiritual good of you and yours, by transcribing these sermons for the press.

DEDICATION.

I desire not (if so may be the will of God) to live any longer in this world, than I may be some way useful in it; and especially to you, to the service of whose souls I have wholly devoted myself, my life and time; nor have I yet seen reason to repent of my having done so.

I have a very grateful sense of your friendship and kindness to me, and your acceptance of my labours (such as they have been) amongst you, for now almost twelve years. Above all, I bless and adore the God of grace, for what good success he has been pleased to give them, either in the conversion or edification of your souls; and that I have reason to think, that I have not wholly run in vain, and laboured in vain.

The success of the sermons which I have preached to young people, on new years days, demands a particular thankful acknowledgment to God: and his having been pleased to smile upon them,
and

DEDICATION.

and bless them in the preaching, has inclined me to yield, that some of them should be made thus publick, in hopes, that the same blessing may still attend them for the press; might it be but to one soul! how little should I regard the censures, which I may probably expect from some persons, for publishing these plain discourses; in which the present fashionable strain of preaching is not so much as aimed at; neither are they at all suited to humour the zealots of any party.

So long as I can reckon myself sure of your favourable acceptance and approbation of them, I seek no other patron: and if God will be pleased to make use of them, for the good of any souls, I covet no other applause.

You will observe, that in disposing these sermons in this volume, I have had no regard to the order in which they were preached; but have so placed them, as, I conceived, the subjects

DEDICATION.

jects on which they treat, would most naturally follow one another.

To what I have here attempted, let me beg, that you would also add the help of your earnest prayers, for the rising generation; that God would pour his Spirit upon our seed, and his blessing upon our offspring; and that Christ, our dear Saviour, may have a numerous seed to serve him, in the next, and in all succeeding ages, till time shall be no more. So prays

Your affectionate Friend, and Servant,

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

March 10,
1729-30.

D. JENNINGS.

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SER-

S E R M O N I.

Good parents concerned for their childrens souls.

I CHRONICLES XXIX. 19.

Give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart.

THIS was the prayer of a godly parent for his son. It is part of the last prayer of King *David*; or however the last public prayer which he made, that is recorded in scripture, and this petition comes in at the very close of that prayer; so that it was probably one of the last petitions which *David* put up to *heaven* before his remove thither. One would expect that a prayer thus circumstanc'd, that is, the last dying prayer of so great a man, and so great a Saint as *David* was, should be something more than ordinarily solemn, and that the blessing which he prays for should be something of the greatest importance: and such, it seems, *David* thought the blessing was which he prays for in our text, viz. that *Solomon* his son might have a *perfect heart*. For this was a thing of great importance to *David*'s own comfort in dying; it would enable him to leave his throne and the world with the greater satisfaction, if he had reason to hope that his son, and successor in the kingdom would prove a good man: it was a thing of great and general importance to the whole nation, that their young king should tread in his good father's steps: and it was

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of infinite importance to *Solomon* himself, in order to his being blessed of *God*, both here and hereafter, that he should have a perfect heart. Here *David* prays like a good king, and a good father; as a king for his successor, and as a father for his son. In the latter of these two views of this prayer, I would recommend it as a pattern for parents to copy after; 'tis a prayer which you should pray for your children, Lord give them perfect hearts. In this prayer, as it stands in our text, three things are to be considered.

First, The blessing itself which is desired, and that is a *perfect heart*.

Secondly, Of whom this blessing is desired and asked, *viz.* of *God*.

Thirdly, By whom, and for whom this prayer is made, *viz.* by *David* for his son *Solomon*.

First, The blessing which is here desired is a *perfect heart*. It will be necessary for me to explain, in a few Words, what that signifies. Now the heart, in scripture language, commonly means quite another thing than what *Anatomists* mean by the same word: it signifies not any part of the body, but the soul; sometimes more particularly the affections and passions, but more commonly the heart means the whole soul, with all its faculties and powers, such as understanding, will, and affections. Men are said to *believe with the heart*; and we read of an *understanding heart*, as well as of *loving with the heart*; and the gracious disposition of the whole soul, as it is renewed by divine grace, is called, by the Apostle, *the hidden man of the heart*. The heart then is the soul, which is the chief seat either of grace and religion, or of sin and wickedness. We must further inquire also, what is meant by a
perfect

perfect heart: and certainly this is not to be taken in the most strict and absolute sense, for such a perfect heart as *Adam* had before his fall, or as the *man Christ Jesus* had, in neither of whom there was any imperfection or sin; for, alas! such a perfect heart is now no where to be found, nor ever to be expected in any of *Adam's* posterity, on this side *heaven*. We must therefore necessarily understand this phrase in our text in a lower and qualify'd sense: for it is not to be supposed that *David* pray'd without a prospect; tho' the thing was, to be sure, extremely desirable, and what *David* would have most heartily wish'd, that his son *Solomon's* heart might be as perfect as *Adam's* ever was; yet *David* well knew that this would be but a vain wish: and sure he would not solemnly pray for that for his son, which he knew was never granted to any son of *Adam*. But there is another and lower sense of this word perfect, according to which good men are often in scripture called perfect men, and a gracious heart may be called a perfect heart. Thus *Noah* and *Job* are said to be *perfect men*, *Gen. ix. 6.* *Job i. 1.* tho' neither of them were sinless men; they both had their spots, and frailties, and imperfections. We read of *Noah's* being drunk once, a plain sign that he was not perfect; and *Job* freely acknowledges for his part, that he was far short of sinless perfection, *Job ix. 20.* *If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.* A perfect heart therefore commonly means a gracious heart: a heart that is renew'd, and sanctify'd, and set right towards God and heaven. Such a heart may be called perfect, and not improperly, for

1.) There is a perfection of parts, which may

be truly ascribed to every gracious heart. In much the same sense that a new born child may be called a perfect man, every gracious heart may be called a perfect heart: for it is perfect as to parts, tho' not in degree. As a little infant has all the limbs and members of a perfect man, so every regenerate soul has all the graces of a perfect saint: there is every feature and lineament of the divine image, tho' as yet they are but faintly drawn, in comparison with what they shall be. Thus far a gracious heart is a perfect heart. But

2.) The true meaning of perfect, as applied in scripture to sinful men, seems to be sincere or upright. As he who hates sin, and strives against it, is said not to commit sin, 1 *John* iii. 9. so he that does really and truly desire and endeavour to do all his duty, is said to be perfect. Thus *Nathaniel* is characterized by *Christ*, who knew his heart and life, *An Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile*, *John* i. 17. not that *Nathaniel* lived without sin, but there was no prevailing, no allowed guile in his heart: he was a downright honest good man, without any arts of hypocrisy or deceit. Such a one was *Nathaniel*, and such a one *David* desir'd that his son *Solomon* might prove; that he might have a *perfect heart*. Upon the whole then, a gracious heart is the perfect heart which our text speaks of. And that any heart of man may be so, it must have the following properties, which I will just name to you. As

1.] A perfect heart must be a new heart, so it is call'd, *Ezek.* xviii. 31. that is, a renewed heart, new formed and disposed by the Spirit of *God* in the great work of regeneration. No man is born with a perfect heart, but quite otherwise: every man's heart

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heart is now by nature miserably depraved and polluted. The good and perfect heart must therefore be a renewed heart.

2.] A good and perfect heart must be a soft and tender heart. So it is described, *Ezek. xi. 19. I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.* And it is mention'd to the praise of good King *Josiah*, God himself mentions it with great approbation, that his *heart was tender*, 2 Kings xxii. 19. that is, as you may see by the story there, his heart was easily impress'd with the word of God; he laid it to heart, as we say, and was greatly affected with it.

3.] A good and perfect heart must be an obedient heart. It must be disposed to a ready and willing obedience to the whole will of God. This is called *a heart to fear God and to walk in his statutes.* And it is otherwise express'd, by *God's writing his law in the heart*, which means an inward disposition of soul, that inclines a man to practise the outward rule of duty. Once more,

4.] A good and perfect heart must be a believing heart. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness*, Rom. x. 10. And this is as material, and essential a property of a good heart as any whatever; for without faith in *Christ* there is no pardon to be had, no mercy to be expected. And whatever other good qualities there may be in our hearts, yet nothing without the robe of *Christ's* righteousness, which is put on by faith, will ever recommend them to the acceptance of a just and holy God. It is now time to dismiss this first head. Thus we have considered what that great, and desirable blessing is, which is mention'd in our text. It is a perfect heart.

The *second* thing which I observed in this text is, of whom this blessing is desired and asked; and it is of *God*. You may see to whom this prayer was offered up in the verse before our text, *O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel our fathers, give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart*. As the heart was originally *God's* gift, as the *God* of nature; so a perfect and good heart, in a fallen creature, can only be from his gift, as the *God* of grace. No power but his, who made the heart at first, can make it anew, and restore its original perfection. Without the grace of *God*, all human instructions, and the warmest and most pathetic motives to holiness and goodness will be in vain. The watchful care, the wisest counsels, and most affectionate persuasions of godly parents will avail nothing: 'tis *God* alone that can give a perfect heart. This, it seems, *David* was very sensible of. No doubt but the good man had conscientiously done his duty, in the religious education of his son; he had done all that he could do, to make him a good, as well as a great man. If you look back, but into the last chapter before this where our text is, in the 9th *verse*, you may see a specimen of *David's* instructing and counselling his son *Solomon*: how seriously does he deal with him about his soul! how solemnly does he charge him! and in what moving language does he exhort and persuade him to be religious! *Thou Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever*. What could a father say more and better? *David* had done all that

a man could do, to form his son for godliness, as well as greatness; and for *heaven*, as well as the throne of *Israel*. But, after all, he was very sensible, that the whole success depended on the blessing and grace of *God*; and therefore he follows all with prayer. “ O *Lord*, do thou give unto *Solomon* my son a perfect heart. It is not his being my son will make him thine, and make him a good and happy man, without thy grace and spirit to renew his soul. I have given him the best instructions I could, that was my duty; *Lord* give him thy grace, that is thy gift, and thine only.” This is very observable in our text; that after all the instructions, and good counsels, and all the methods of religious education, which *David* had used towards his son, he begs that *God* would give him a perfect heart; as being sensible that this was the gift of *God*, and of him alone. I go on to the

Third thing which I observed in the text; and that is by whom, and for whom, this prayer was made. It was by *David* for his son *Solomon*. It was the prayer of an aged dying parent for his dear child, and for the soul of his child, which is the greatest concern of all. *David* makes no other request for *Solomon* in all this prayer but only this, “ *Lord* give him a perfect heart: make him but a good man, and I ask no more for him; for then I am sure he will be well provided for, and then I can chearfully leave him to the care of providence for the present life and world.” Here you see the longing, the breathing, the vehement desire of the soul of a godly parent; it is for the welfare of his dear children, and above all for their spiritual and eternal welfare. Next to his own salvation, there is nothing which he desires so

much as that, nothing which lies with so much weight upon his mind, and for which he will pray more earnestly. O Lord God of our fathers, give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart. Here Critics observe an elegance in the *Hebrew*, which our *English* cannot well express: the word *perfect* alludes to the name *Solomon*, they sound much alike in the *Hebrew*, and they agree in sense too, for *Solomon* signifies either *peaceable* or *perfect*. * Lord make him a *Solomon* indeed; make him answer his name, and perfect him by thy grace. *Solomon* was, probably, as complete a young Prince, of his age, as the world ever saw, both for natural parts, and acquired accomplishments; he seemed well to deserve his name *Solomon*: but *Lord*, without a perfect heart, without inward grace and religion, what is all this? 'tis but like the fine carved ornaments of a tomb, which incloses nothing but filth and corruption. A perishing sinner, an apostate son or daughter of *Adam*, made for immortality, but going on in the broad road to *hell*; 'tis always a sad sight, a moving object of compassion and pity: but when I see a lovely young person, in the bloom and flower of life, adorn'd with the beauties of nature, and accomplished with the arts of education, and yet, it is to be feared, in an unregenerate state, an enemy to *God*, and a child of the *Devil*, what great pity is it! My soul melts with double sorrow, to think, that such lovely qualities should all be lost in *hell*, and swallowed up in the lake of burning: who would not put up a fervent

* The words in the *Hebrew* are *Shelomoh* and *Shalem*, both from *shalam* to be perfect, or to be at peace, from whence comes the participle *meshullam*, *Isai*. xlii. 19. and the *Arabick* *Mussulman*, a title which the *Mahometans* give to themselves, signifying perfect.

prayer for such a young person, “ Lord give him a perfect heart too, make him truly good, and make him happy for ever.” But this will, in a special manner, be the earnest prayer of godly parents for their dear children; here the affections of nature will quicken the desires of grace, to see *Christ* formed in the hearts of their children, and to have them secured of salvation. *O that Ishmael might live before thee!* said *Abraham*, *Gen. xvii. 18.* when *God* had just made him the promise of *Isaac*: a promise so full of blessings, that, one would think, it should have satisfied all his desires at once: but *Abraham* could not bear to think, that any child of his should be cast off by *God*, and be lost eternally; therefore he prays, *O that Ishmael might live before thee!* I will enlarge upon this observation from the text. And I shall

I. Shew you for what reasons godly parents will earnestly desire and pray, that their children may be good and gracious.

II. I shall hint to you the peculiar arguments which godly parents have to plead with *God* in behalf of their children.

III. I shall close with a serious address both to parents and to their children about this matter.

I. Let us consider the reasons of this prayer, and of that earnest desire which there is in all godly parents, that their children may be good and gracious. Why was this so much *David's* concern, that *Solomon* his son might have a *perfect heart*? The reasons are plain, both from natural affection and grace. I will mention these that follow.

1.) Their having been the means of conveying to their children a corrupted nature, and an evil heart, must needs make them to be much concerned,

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and greatly desirous that *God* would renew them and give them a perfect heart. My friends, you know the hearts of your children by your own: you know what a corrupt nature they have brought into the world, by what your own was; or if you know not, the word of *God* will tell you, that it is a *very sinful heart*; 'tis a *heart full of wickedness*, and *foolishness* and *enmity against God*, which these children of yours were born with; and therefore their state by nature is extremely wretched, for they are *children of God's wrath*, Ephes. ii. 3. they are naturally haters of *God*, and therefore hateful to *God*: their heart is like a heart of stone, obstinate and stubborn; and if they should die without being born again, they are heirs of *hell* and will be children of perdition. And is not this a most sad case? Can you think of it as the case of your own dear children, without a pitiful concern for them? to think what they are by nature, and what a *hell* they are born heirs to, 'tis a sad thought. What tears can be more just, than those which a pious parent drops over an unregenerate child? And it must surely be an affecting circumstance of concern to you, that you have been the instruments of conveying this corrupted nature to your dear offspring, and of bringing them into so sad a state. 'Tis thro' your mediation that they inherit this woful depravity, which was first occasioned by *Adam's* transgression. I do not say this was properly your fault, but you will own it to be a very unhappy case; and if you have ever been convinced yourselves, how dreadful a thing the corruption of nature is, you will be greatly concerned that your children may be delivered from it. And O! what reason have you to do all you can, to get them cured of this plague
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of the heart which they have catch'd from you. That was a most reasonable and righteous law which you find among the statutes of *Moses*, *Exod. xxi. 19.* that if one man had wounded another and occasioned his hurt, *he shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.* Here is a far more deadly wound, which sin has given to the souls of your children; and should not you do all that you can to get them healed? especially, when you have been the unhappy instruments and occasions of it. Suppose, that by some accident, you had grievously hurt one of your children, so as to endanger its life; what a vast concern would it give you! how anxious would you be for its safety! "Should my dear child die, "I should never forgive myself," says the tender parent: but, O Sirs! should your dear children die in their sins, and perish everlastingly, thro' that corruption of nature which you have convey'd to them, and you not endeavour to save them; who could ever forgive you? How could you ever forgive yourselves? Your children would have reason to curse you in *hell* for ever, that ever you brought them into so wretched a state, and took no pains to help them out of it. Consider, my friends, what an evil heart you have convey'd to your children; and if you have any sense what an evil that is, I know you will be concerned for them, and this will make you very earnest with *God*, to give them a perfect heart.

2.) Holy parents are very desirous that their children may be good and gracious, because upon this their own comfort in them does chiefly depend. They desire it for their own sakes: for 'tis a sad and hard thing for parents to bear children with pain, and breed them up with a great deal of tenderness, and

and expence, and care, and to deny themselves of many comforts merely for their childrens sakes, as parents often do, 'tis a hard case, I say, when all this kindness and care is requited on the childrens part with contempt and disobedience. I take it to be one of the saddest circumstances of human sorrow, when wicked and undutiful children bring down the hoary heads of their good parents with sorrow to the grave; and requite their love by breaking their hearts. Now the best, and only effectual security you can have, that your children will prove dutiful, and therefore comfortable to you, is their becoming truly religious. If once they know their duty to *God*, they will not forget their duty to you. The grace of *God* will make them obedient children; and that will make them the delight of your eyes, and the comfort of your declining age. Alas! what comfort can you ever expect in wicked and profligate children; those sons of *Belial*, who cause shame to themselves, and their parents too? But *a wise son, says Solomon, maketh a glad father: and the father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice.* As nothing gives parents a more sensible grief, than the ill doing of their children; so nothing, in this world, gives them a more sensible joy, than to see their children do well, and prove well. Now as ever you hope for this comfort, you must do all that you can to bring your children to be religious: and you must be earnest and importunate with the *God* of grace, that he would give them a perfect heart. If you can but once obtain this for them, you may then depend upon comfort in them: you may be sure they will do well, for then *God* will love them; He will love them as much as you do; and can you desire that
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he would love them better? Yea but in this, his kindness will exceed all you can desire: the fondest love of the most tender mother to her sucking infant, is nothing to compare with the love of *God* to his children, *Isaiah* xlix. 15. Then *God* will bless them and make them a blessing. Then it will be no great matter what you can give them, for they will be sure of the best portion. *Happy shall they be whose God is the Lord.* And O! what a comfort will this be to you, to see your dear children made thus happy? How will this sweeten your dying bed, and make it easy to pronounce the last farewell? "Farewell my dear children; you have been the comfort and joy of my life, I bless *God* for you: I am now going to leave you, but I leave you with a better and kinder Father, your father's *God*, and your own covenant *God*; in his care you will always be safe, his providence will surely provide for you, your *God* has promised to bless you: farewell, my dear children, for a little while, we shall shortly meet again in a better and happier world." This is comfortable dying, and taking leave of a family. But O! what anguish fills the heart of many a good dying parent, who is afraid that he is going to take his last and eternal farewell of his children, never to meet them any more? "O! my children, you have been the breaking of your parent's heart, the *Lord* forgive you: O that I had been written childless! farewell, I must leave you, but 'tis a sad parting to leave you in the broad road to *hell*." Thus you see, how much the comfort of good parents in their children, does, on all accounts, depend on their being good and gracious; and therefore will such parents most earnestly desire and beg of *God*, that he would give their children a perfect heart. 3.)

3.) Another reason is, their affection and love to their children; they desire it for their childrens sake, as well as for their own. As the parents comfort very much depends on their childrens happiness, so they well know that their childrens happiness wholly depends on their being good and gracious persons; without this, there is no reason to expect that God will bless them, either here, or hereafter. They may indeed scramble, and gather some of the outward gifts of providence, for these are not the Father's peculiar and distinguishing blessings: as to these matters, all things seem to come alike to all, tho' yet in reality it is much otherwise, for *the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blebseth the habitation of the just*, Prov. iii. 33. and to possess the whole world, with the curse of God, would be but a miserable portion. O! how much happier is the poor christian who has his little with a blessing, and with his father's love! If he has but a little, yet it is certainly just so much as is best for him to have; for all his affairs are in his heavenly Father's hand, *who performeth all things for him*. An infinitely wise and good God is pleased to charge himself with the whole conduct and care of his children, and has promised that *he will make all things work together for their good*; and what can be desired more? What can the fondest parent wish better for his children than this? If God will love them and bless them, all shall be well with them: but now it is certain that God will love none but those who are good, *He hateth all the workers of iniquity and is angry with the wicked every day*. His promises of blessing are only to gracious persons. So that all the parents hope, that God will bless their children, even in this world, depends on their being good

good and gracious: and much more, that he will bless them in another world, and make them happy for ever. For without this new and perfect heart, there will be no possibility of their ever getting to *heaven*, no possibility of their escaping the torments of *hell*, and of being made happy in the presence and enjoyment of *God*. For *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. It is not their being the children of good people, that can give them a birth-right to *heaven*; but they must themselves be born from above, they must be made partakers of a divine nature, they must be regenerate and converted, or he who has the keys of the heavenly world has positively and peremptorily declared, that they shall never come there. Well, and what good parent does not most earnestly wish and desire, that his children may be saved and made happy for ever? O! how grievous is the thought, that any of my dear children should go to *hell*, and be tormented for ever in those flames! Here every pain which the child feels reaches the parents heart; they can't bear to see their children hurt, how then can they bear the thought, that these children of theirs should be cast into *hell*, and be doom'd to everlasting torments? One would think, that even natural affection should prompt all parents, and especially all good parents, to do whatever they can to prevent it, and to be earnest and importunate with *God* for the souls of their children, that he would give them a perfect heart. I may add one reason more, of this desire of holy parents, that their children may prove holy and good. And that is

4.) They desire it for the honour of *God*, and for the support of *Christ's* cause and interest in the world. As for their parts, they must shortly go off the

the stage and leave their families, and leave the churches they belong'd to; the places which know them will, in a little time, know them no more. And it is sometimes a melancholy thought with an aged christian, that probably when he dies, religion itself will die in his family, and there will be no more worship of *God* there: and that he is like to be sadly missed in the *church* which he is a member of. He does not see young ones rising up to fill up their father's places; and therefore it looks with a sad prospect, as if religion was wearing away, and the interest of *Christ* was like to sink in the next generation. Now, who that has any love to *Christ*, or any value for his cause and interest, would not do all that he can to support it, both while he lives, and after he is dead? The true christian desires that *Christ's* interest may be a lasting and growing interest, that he may have a seed to serve him in all generations, 'till time shall be no more. But from whence must we expect a succession of christians, if not from among the children of holy parents, whose families are ordinarily the nurseries of the churches of *Christ*? and therefore if these fail our hopes, and turn their backs on religion, there is little to be expected, but that in a short time, religion itself will languish and die. This is an affecting consideration, and, upon this account, it is a matter of great concern, and it will be so with good persons, that their children may prove good and gracious. Therefore will they be earnest and importunate with *God*, for their *own* sake, for their *dear childrens* sake, and for *Christ's* sake, that he would give them perfect hearts.

We have now considered the reasons of this desire and prayer, such as *David* makes for *Solomon* in
the

the text, and such as all holy parents must be supposed to put up for their children, that *God* would give them a perfect heart. I proposed

II. To consider, what special and peculiar arguments holy parents have to plead with *God* in behalf of their children, that he would give them a perfect heart. *David's* argument in the text is, *give unto Solomon my son*. His being *David's* son was not only the reason that *David* was so much concerned for him, and so desirous that *God* would bless him, and make him good; but I conceive, that he mentions it as an argument which he pleads with *God* in behalf of *Solomon*, *he is my son*. As *David* had laid hold on *God's* covenant for himself, so here he pleads it for his son too; and as *God* had made many promises of blessings to the seed of his people, *David* lays hold on them for this seed of his, and begs for him, above all other blessings, that *God* would give him a perfect heart. It is an argument which I find *David* pleading with *God* for himself, that he was the son of a godly parent, one of the holy seed, *Psalms* cxvi. 16. *O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid*. And as *David* was a good man himself, he could plead the same argument for his son also, "Lord bless *Solomon*, make him a good man, for he is my child, whom thou hast been pleased to take into covenant with thyself." You that are the children of holy parents, have arguments and promises to plead with *God*, for yourselves, that others have not; and you that are holy parents have arguments and promises to plead with *God*, for your children, that others have not: they stand fairer, on many accounts, for covenant and spiritual blessings, than the children of wicked men. But let us inquire a little

little, what there is in this argument, or what encouragement good people have from the word of *God* to hope and pray for the conversion of *their* children, more than others? Two things I will hint negatively, to prevent mistakes. As.

First, It is certain that the grace of *God* is not confined, and limited to the children of good men. It does not run in the blood; many good fathers and mothers have had the sorrow of wicked children: *David* had his *Abolom*, as well as his *Solomon*: and on the other hand, *Jeroboam*, who was a very wicked man himself, had a good son *Abijah*.

Secondly, It is certain, that the best of men have no merit of their own to plead with *God*, in behalf either of themselves or their children. Was *God* to deal with us according to our own merits, we should all be cast off, and destroy'd, and our children too. But yet, there are *two things* which holy parents have to plead with *God* for *their children*, that others have not. *First* his covenant with them and their seed. And *secondly* that solemn dedication, which they have made of their children to *God*, by his own appointment.

1.) They may plead with *God* his own covenant with them, and their seed after them. *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee*, was the promise of *God*'s covenant with *Abraham*; and it is the whole scope and design of the Apostle *Paul*, in the third chapter to the *Galatians*, to prove that the covenant of *Abraham* is still in force and being, and that his blessing is come upon all true believers under the gospel dispensation: that tho' the natural posterity of *Abraham* are indeed broken off, yet the believing *Gentiles* are grafted into the same *olive tree*, in their room and stead; and are consequently entitled

tled to all the same blessings and privileges, which were antiently promised to *Abraham's* posterity. Now the blessing wherewith our father was blessed was this, *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee.* Well, you that are believing *Gentiles*, have this promise to plead in its full force; your childrens names are in the sacred bond as much as ever *Abraham's* was: they are not unclean, but foederally holy to God, 1 Cor. vii. 11. Was it a reason with Christ, why he would bring salvation to *Zaccheus*, and his house, because he was a son of *Abraham*? *Luke* xix. 9. You have the same reason to alledge, the same plea to make, the same argument to use for your children; for they are happily become, by your faith, the seed of *Abraham* too. The promise is to you and your seed; plead it with God, plead it earnestly for your dear offspring, "Lord they are my children, thou hast enabled me by thy grace to lay hold on thy covenant for myself; I would now lay hold on it for my children too, O that they might live before thee! be thou a God unto them according to thy word, and make them thine; Lord give them a perfect heart." This is one argument.

2.) Consequently upon this, holy parents may plead their dedication of their children to God, by his own appointment. *Solomon* had been consecrated to God in the ordinance of circumcision: thereby he was received into the visible church, and God's mark was set upon him. This might very well afford *David* an encouraging argument to plead in prayer, "Lord, I have given up this my son unto thee, I have done it by thine own appointment and command, I have solemnly consecrated him to thy service; behold thy mark is upon him!"

" Lord

“ Lord cast him not off utterly, own him for thy
 “ son, and make him thine for ever.” This *David*
 had to plead with *God*. Now baptism is the *circum-*
cision of Christ, or of the christian dispensation,
Col. ii. 11, 12. And you that have, in the same
 manner, devoted your children to *God* in baptism,
 have the same arguments to plead, and the same
 encouragements to lay hold of, in praying for them.”

“ Lord, my children are thine, I have solemnly
 “ given them up to thee, at thine own command;
 “ and wilt thou not graciously accept that offering
 “ which thou wast pleased to demand? O! let
 “ not any of my children, which have been conse-
 “ crated to thee, and thy service, be the portion
 “ of the destroyer; Lord give them thy grace,
 “ Lord give them a perfect heart.”

These are the peculiar arguments, which holy
 parents have to plead with *God* in behalf of their
 children: viz. *his covenant* with them and their
 seed, and *their solemn dedication* of their children to
God, in the methods of his own appointment.

III. The *third* thing which I proposed, for a
 close of this discourse, was a serious address both
 to parents and their children about this matter.

First, To you who are parents, I have a serious
 word or two to leave with you. As

1.) I am afraid that the things, which have been
 spoken, may, with but too much reason, shame
 and humble some of you; for that you have not
 been so much concerned about the souls of your
 children, and you have not been so earnest with
God in prayer for them, as you should have been.
 It is well if all of us, who are parents, must not
 take shame to ourselves upon this account. O!
 my friends, what a trust has *God* committed to us,
 and

and yet how have we neglected it? How shall we answer for our charge another day? Have we indeed done all that we could, and all that we might have done, to save our childrens souls? One often hears people complaining of wicked children; I pity them with all my heart. But let me ask you a serious question too, Did you ever pray this prayer for your children in good earnest? Lord give them a perfect heart. Have you indeed been importunate with God for his grace to be bestowed on your children? what pains have you taken to instruct and teach them the good ways of holiness? Have you ever dealt seriously with them about their souls? Alas! is there not but too much reason, that you should weep for yourselves, and mourn your own neglects; as well as weep over your rebellious and wicked children. May you not read your sin in your punishment? They prove bad: is not one reason of it, that you took little or no pains to make them good? I must leave your own consciences to answer these questions, but let me tell you they are very serious ones.

2.) Let me leave you with a word or two of advice and direction. I would hope that by this time, at least, you are concerned for your childrens souls; and you are sensible, how great a duty lies upon you, to do all you can, to save them. Well, is this indeed your great concern and prayer, that your children may have perfect hearts? I will just hint to you some of those means which you must use in order hereunto, tho' all with a dependance on the grace of God for the good success of them. As that

You should be diligent in *instructing* them in the things of God and their salvation; and begin your instructions betimes, while their minds are yet tender;

der. Endeavour to fortify them early with good principles against the temptations which they will soon meet with. Tell them of their natural corruption, in which they were born, and tell them of *Jesus* the only Saviour of young or old sinners. Explain to them, in the easiest manner you can, the nature and necessity of repentance, and regeneration, and faith in our *Lord Jesus Christ*, the meaning of their baptismal covenant, and the obligations they are under personally to lay hold on it, and yield themselves to *God*.

Faithfully *reprove* them for their faults, and by no means wink at, or make light of their little sins; for these will harden their consciences, and make room for greater.

Always let the *manner* of your instructions and reproofs be with *seriousness* and *gravity*, and with *kindness* and *tenderness*, such as may best convince them of your love and concern for their souls.

Be sure that to all you add a holy example; go before them in the ways of piety.

Teach them to pray, by praying with them. Keep up the worship of *God* constantly in your families; and direct and exhort them to pray by themselves in secret.

Whenever you perceive that they are under convictions, O! watch and improve the happy opportunity, to deal seriously with them, and encourage their return to *God*. If you have reason to hope that there is a *good work* begun in them, advise them to join in communion with some church of *Christ*; this will be an excellent means of their confirmation, and a probable security against future backsliding and apostacy.

Above

Above all forget not that means which you find in our text, and that is *prayer*. O! be earnest and importunate with *God*, be daily intercessors with him for the souls of your dear children. Beg it of him, who is the *God* of grace, that he would give your children a perfect heart. I close now,

Secondly, With a serious address to children and young persons themselves. My dear young friends, you have heard of what great importance your conversion and piety is, in what I have been saying to your parents, so that I need not add much to you in particular: I will however leave with you these *four* things.

1.) Have you godly parents who pray for you, and who manifest a great concern for your souls? Take it kindly, be thankful to them, as well as bless *God* for such parents. Let this reconcile you to those reproofs which they may sometimes see it needful to give you. How unreasonable, how barbarous would it be, to treat their instructions or reproofs with contempt! Sure you should, at least, love them and honour them the more, for this great concern which they shew for your good, for your souls. They know, that without this perfect heart formed in you, you will be wretched and miserable creatures; their bowels yearn over you, they long to see you good, and secured of happiness. Take this kindly from them, and account not only of their instructions and advice, but of their reproofs too as the tokens of their love.

2.) Join with your godly parents in putting up this prayer for yourselves; Lord give me a perfect heart! 'tis that on which all your happiness depends. O! that you were but convinced how needful a blessing this is for you; and I am sure you would

never

24 *Good parents concerned, &c.*

never think it too soon to be converted, and become new creatures. I would fain hope that some of you do really desire this; then,

3.) Be encouraged to set about conversion, from the advantages which you have, as being the children of holy parents. Remember, those of you whose happiness this is to have godly parents, that you stand fairer for spiritual blessings, than the children of wicked men; there are many promises to encourage you, and there are many prayers on the file, as it were, which have been put up for you: now if you are but willing and desirous to be converted, no doubt but the work will easily be done; there will be no such difficulty in it as perhaps you think for. *God* and *Christ* will most readily receive you, who are the children of his servants, the seed of his covenant friends. But then remember this one thing more

4.) That if after all these prayers which have been put up for you, by your good parents, and all the peculiar advantages which you have for religion, you should prove wicked and vile; you must expect the heaviest judgment, the most dreadful condemnation of all sinners. Those prayers of your parents will then be on the file against you; their serious admonitions and reproofs, and it may be too, the strivings of the Spirit of *God*, at some times, with your own souls, will rise up in judgment against you. O! then it would have been better for you to have been born of heathen parents than of Christians. But *God* forbid that it should prove thus with any of you.

SER.

S E R M O N II.

The young sinner convinced; or, the evil and danger of youthful sins.

JOB xiii. 26.

For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.

THE sins and follies of youth are generally made very light of; to say of the vilest action, it was a *trick of youth*, palliates the matter and almost excuses it: thus it is in the common account of men, but if we look into the word of *God* (that book according to which old and young shall be judged another day) we shall find the sins of youth quite otherwise rated there. There young men are exhorted to be *sober-minded*, and warned to *fly youthful lusts*, as most dangerous and destructive to their souls. We find that *David* had a very humbling sense of his youthful sins, from his prayer for the pardon of them, Psalm xxv. 7. *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness—sake O Lord.* We find *Solomon* also, in his *Ecclesiastes*, bitterly lamenting his youthful faults and frolics. And *Job* lets us know, in the text, how grievous the remembrance of his youthful iniquities

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was to him: these were sins which he had committed long ago, but he had not done with them yet; for a humbling and afflicting sense of their guilt stuck fast to his soul, now in his advanced years, and pierc'd him thro' with many sorrows. These were the *bitter things* which he speaks of in the former part of the text, *Thou writest bitter things against me.* The latter clause explains the former, and declares what these *bitter things* were, viz. *the iniquities of his youth.* God's writing bitter things against him signifies his charging him with the guilt of those sins; and so the words are very expressive of *Job's* distress and fear, lest *God* should condemn him for his youthful sins and follies.

I suppose there may be an allusion in our text to the antient custom, of writing bills of accusation against malefactors, in which were specified the crimes they were condemned for, and these were publish'd for the vindicating of publick justice. Thus *Pilate* writ our *Saviour's* accusation, and nailed it to his cross; in which was specified the pretended crime that he was condemned for, viz. that he was, or that he set up himself to be, *the King of the Jews.* Probably, in allusion to some such custom as this, *Job* expresses the apprehension which he had of *God's* condemning him for his youthful sins, in these words, *Thou writest bitter things against me,* that is, as it follows in the latter clause, *Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.* In these words there are *two* things to be considered and inquired into, which will make way for a practical improvement of them.

I. What are the peculiar iniquities or sins of youth.

II. What

the evil and danger of youthful sins. 27

II. What it is for a man to be made to possess the iniquities of his youth.

I. What are we to understand here by the iniquities of youth? There is no doubt but they take in all the sins which are committed in our younger years. We come sinners into the world, *being shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin*, Psalm li. 5. and *we are called transgressors from the womb*, Isaiah xlviii. 8. It is an inquiry but of little moment, how soon we begin to commit actual sin. *Solomon* has observed long ago that *foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child*, and no sooner, almost, do children begin to act at all, but we may make the same observation ourselves: natural corruption discovers itself with the first glimmerings of reason, and visibly taints, almost, our earliest actions: well may we therefore be called *transgressors from the womb*. It is further certain from scripture that every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, and makes the sinner liable to it, the sins of childhood and youth not excepted. We need a pardon for every sin that we ever committed in all our lives; and was one only to be excepted out of the general pardon, one sin of our youngest years, that would for ever exclude us out of *heaven*, and sink our guilty souls into the pit of burnings. We ought therefore to be humbled before God for the sins of our very childhood and youth, and to pray with *David*, that He would *remember us with mercy*, with respect to *our youthful sins*.

But besides this general account of youthful sins, it may be very proper to take a more particular and distinct account of them. For it is evident that there are some particular sins which young persons are more especially prone to, and which may there-

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fore, most properly, be called the sins of youth: and to such sins, it is highly probable, our text has a special reference. Though the corruption of nature inclines us to all sin, and works in us, as the *Apostle* speaks, *all manner of concupiscence*; yet it does not follow that every man must be equally prone to every sin; nay, experience assures us that this is not the case: very often the temperament of the body favours one lust more than another; hence some people are naturally passionate, others are as naturally addicted to drunkenness, or uncleanness, or the like: so the different ages of human life have their different temptations, and their peculiar sins; some sins are, in a special manner, the iniquities of youth; that is, such sins as young persons are commonly most prone to; and there are also the sins of manhood, and of old age. Peculiar temptations surround us in every stage, and in every circumstance of our pilgrimage. The iniquities of youth fall under our consideration at present; and I will take the liberty to mention some of them, not, I am sure, with a design to expose any young persons, but merely to caution them, and to point out where their greatest danger lies, that they may the better avoid and escape it.

The prevailing iniquities of youth are commonly such as these.

1.) Pride and self-conceit. These, it is true, are vices which stick close to our nature, and we shall hardly ever get quite rid of them, 'till mortality and corruption shall be destroy'd together. Pride seems to have been the first sin both of angels, and men. The *Devil* was lifted up with pride, and so fell into condemnation, 1 *Tim.* iii. 6. and this was undoubtedly the ruin of our first parents; they

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they affected to be like Gods, but thereby sunk into ruin and misery. And now ever since the fall, pride has incorporated itself into the nature of man: But whether it is, that when we grow up to years of discretion, we see the folly of pride, and so really become more humble; or whether it is, that we learn to disguise it more artfully, and conceal it from the notice of others; certain it is, that pride and conceit are commonly the most apparent in young persons. This evil root shoots up betimes. Mark but little children, how soon do they grow proud of their clothes! how vain of some gawdy trifle! you will plainly see pride begin to shew itself, as soon, almost, as there is any thing for it to lay hold on. But to leave the infant, we presently commence men, in our own conceit, and fancy ourselves mighty wise. It was antiently observed of young men, who go to the Universities (and human nature is just the same still) that the first year of their studies, they are no less than Doctors in their own conceit, they know every thing and understand every thing; the second year they grow to be scholars; and it may be (if they have a tolerable good genius) by the third or fourth years, they begin to be humbled into learners: for to know our own ignorance is truly one of the last things that we learn. Pride and self-conceit are intimately woven into the character of the young prodigal in the parable, *Luke xv*. He would not, truly, be made a boy of all his life, and be under his father's government, now he was grown a man: he thinks himself very capable of managing for himself, and therefore he desires that he may have his portion in his own hands. *Give me*, says he to his father, impudently enough, *give me the portion of goods that*

falleth to me. “ I am now come to years of discretion, and I’ll warrant that I know how to govern myself, and manage my own affairs, as well as any body can for me; therefore pray let me have my liberty, and leave me to myself; ne’er doubt but I’ll acquit myself like a man.” This is a lively, and alas! but too natural a description of the minds and thoughts of the generality of young persons; for pride and conceit are vices and follies which youth is greatly prone to.

I cannot pass this head, without the following remark. When I take a view of youth and old age, and observe the different inclinations, and passions, of those very different stages of human life; I am ready to say, *Lord*, what a ridiculous creature is man grown! what a monster of folly has sin made him! *Pride* is observed to be the prevailing sin of youth, and *covetousness* to be, as generally, the prevailing sin of old age. What in the world can be more preposterous, than for young men to be proud, and old men covetous? Was it just the contrary, it would not be quite so bad, or at least, not quite so absurd and ridiculous: were young men covetous, and old men proud, methinks they would have something to say for it; these vices would then appear with a better grace, and with something like reason on their side. The old man has seen more than others, and knows more than others, and methinks one might allow him to be a little proud of that superior knowledge, which his age and experience have given him. The young man, who expects to live a great while longer, and probably may do so; if he is provident and sparing, who will blame him? Nay though he should be a little covetous, most people would be very ready to excuse

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cuse it; we should call it prudence, it is laying up against a rainy day, as we say, or whatever may happen. But for old men to be covetous, and young men proud, as is commonly the case, what can be more absurd? What a ridiculous creature has sin made man? A covetous old man, who is grasping after the world just as he is going out of it, is (as the famous Sir *Thomas Moor* used to say) like a thief that steals as he is going to the gallows. On the other hand, to see a young creature, who has but just, almost, opened his eyes on the world, who knows very little, and has had no experience, to see such a creature, proud, and conceited, to hear him give his judgment, and censure, and condemn, as if he knew all, and was the only wise man upon the face of the earth, what can be more preposterous? How wretchedly is human nature sunk by the fall! The *wicked man* and the *fool* are the same thing in the language of scripture; and certainly, there is no such folly in the world as sin.

But it is high time to proceed to other particulars of youthful sins.

2.). Disobedience to parents is another of the too common iniquities of youth. And this often flows out of the former corrupt springs of *pride* and *self-conceit*: as the young prodigal, being conceited of his own wisdom and management, grew impatient of his father's restraints, and would submit to his government no longer. Obedience to parents is one of the peculiar duties of young persons; and it is a duty which the scripture lays a mighty stress upon. One of the ten commandments is all about it, a special blessing is promised to the practice of it, and it is declared to be a thing which is peculiarly pleasing to *God*. *Children, obey your parents in all*

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things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord, Col. iii. 20. On the other hand, disobedience to parents is a grievous sin, and the curse of God is threatned to it over and over; Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother, Deut. xxvii. 16. The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it, Prov. xxx. 17. He that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death, Exod. xxi. 15. The very Heathens had such an abhorrence of this sin, that they contrived the most exquisite torments to punish parricides, or murderers of their parents, more dreadful than they inflicted on any other criminals. Among the ancient Romans the punishment was thus, As soon as any person was convicted of this unnatural guilt, he was immediately hooded, as unworthy of the common light; in the next place, he was whipp'd with rods, and then sew'd up in a leathern sack, with a serpent, an ape, a dog, and a cock (an unnatural mixture of creatures, as an emblem of unnaturalness) and so was thrown into the sea, or into the next pond, and drowned. Beware of this sin of disobedience to parents, as you love your parents, as you fear God, and as you value your own souls.

3.) *An inordinate love of sensual pleasure is another, too common, iniquity of youth. The young prodigal, for instance, as soon as he was got from under his father's eye, is represented, as immediately swallowed up in all manner of sensual pleasures, to which he was prompted by the heat of his youth. Some sensual pleasures are in themselves unlawful; such as rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness. There is need to exhort young persons, to fly these youthful lusts, as they would the plague, and*

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and to keep out of the way of all temptations to them. There are other sensual pleasures which are *in themselves lawful*; but yet there is danger of abusing them, and of loving them, and following them inordinately, especially in our younger years. It is nothing unbecoming for young persons to be chearful, and pleasant; innocent mirth well suits their years, and God has provided suitable entertainments and pleasures for youth: but the danger is, of loving and following pleasure intemperately, and inordinately, putting it in the place of business, and, what is worse, in the place of religion, and in the place of God, letting it take up the best of our time, and the most of our thoughts; this is *living in pleasures*, and those that do so, *are dead while they live*, 1 Tim. v. 6. They are dead to God; dead as to the great ends and purposes of their creation, and are in great danger of the second and eternal death. Once more,

4.) A careless neglect of religion is, too commonly, an iniquity of youth. Young persons are apt to promise themselves a great while to live, and therefore they suppose, that the work of preparing for eternity cannot be a matter of any great haste: besides religion is too grave and serious a business to mind at present; it will suit better with grey hairs and decrepid age. But alas! this is all but supposition, or perhaps 'tis all a mistake: the present time may be the only time, which the youngest person shall ever have to prepare for an eternal world; it may be now or never: and suppose this reckoning of an age to come should prove a mistake, how fatal, how dreadful would the mistake be! 'Tis all a mistake too, that true religion would any ways sowre the pleasures of youth, and that it

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is a business more suitable to the time of old age: would young persons but try, they would find that religion would every way improve their joys and comforts; that the service of *God* is no slavery at all, but the most perfect freedom; and that *in keeping his commandments there is great reward*. 'Tis therefore a lamentable iniquity, and folly of youth, to live thus in a careless neglect of religion, and to put off the great work of life, upon a vain, or at best, a very uncertain presumption of another, and future, and more convenient season: yet how common a case this is with young persons, I need not say. 'Tis still more sad, that many young persons not only neglect religion, but make a jest and banter of it. 'Tis now a days become a mighty accomplishment among the fashionable youth of the age, to be able to make a jest upon scripture, and to turn things sacred into ridicule. I have thought, sometimes, was it not for the sin, and impiety of this practice, which is shocking to a serious mind; which would it more justly move, one's indignation or laughter? to hear a young smart fellow, who very likely has never read the *Bible*, or however certainly knows no more of it, than only a few sentences, which he has got by the end, to break a jest on; to hear such a young creature pronounce his peremptory sentence, that *the Bible is all nonsense*, and *religion is nothing but priestcraft*. You may take his word for it; he knows a great deal better, than the dull old folks, who have been poring on the *Bible* for half a century. Was it not for the shocking impiety of these young gentlemen, one would only laugh at their conceit and impertinence. 'Tis to be hoped they will grow wiser as they grow older. One might venture to assure them that
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there is a time coming when they will grow more serious; they will certainly talk more decently on a death-bed, or however they will then be soon convinced, that religion and the word of God were no jesting matters.

Thus I have given you a brief view of the iniquities of youth, and have instanced in some of those sins which young persons are more especially prone too. We come now

II. To shew you what it is for a man to be made to *possess* the iniquities of his youth. *Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth*, says Job. As for the pleasure of his youthful sins, *that* was all over and gone, long ago; but the sins themselves did some way remain still. He had committed them formerly, but he had not done with them yet; *Thou makest me to possess them*, that is, *first*, as to the remembrance of them; and, *secondly*, as to the sad consequences of them, which he either felt, or feared.

First, We may be said to *possess* the iniquities of our youth, as to the bitter remembrance of them. The pleasure of sin would be but a poor thing, was it only the gratifying of some vicious appetite for a moment, or, say if you will, for an hour, or for a day or two; and then all was to be forgot and never thought of any more for ever: what a paultry pleasure would this be, which is confined to a few moments of time, but is capable of affording no comfort in an after reflection on it? And yet this would be infinitely better than as the case really is. The pleasure of sin is but for a moment, and then it is gone, and gone for ever; ay, but there is the remembrance of it which will be apt to stick by us, and torment us whether we will or no: for the remembrance

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membrance of sin is naturally disquieting and bitter. Before we commit sin, 'tis in our power to refrain from it; the *Devil* himself can do no more than tempt us, but he cannot force us: but when we have committed sin, it is not in our power to forget it; conscience will be apt to remind us of it, whether we will or no. And when *God* awakens conscience, and sets it on work, there is not such a troublesome and tormenting guest to a sinner in all the world; he cannot get rid of it, it will stick by him day and night, and will be perpetually putting him in mind of his former sins, of those iniquities of his youth which he hoped to have heard no more of. Even the pardon of sin does not always blot out the bitter remembrance of it. *Job*, we have reason to believe, was in a pardoned state, *God* had forgiven him the iniquities of his youth, and yet *He* thought it proper to humble him still, by reviving a bitter remembrance of them in his conscience. *David* was pardoned his sin in the matter of *Uriah*, but it lost him the comfort of his life for all that: he could not forget it; the li. *Psalms* shows how bitter the remembrance of that sin was to him, even after it was pardoned: and it is generally observed, that he speaks and writes in a more melancholy strain in all his composures after that affair, than he used to do before: he was made to possess the bitter remembrance of that sin all his days. And so the sins and follies of youth do often lay in a store of sorrow, and bitter reflection for all the life after.

Secondly, We may be made to *possess* the iniquities of our youth, as to the sad consequences, and effects of them; and this was what *Job* both felt and feared. He already felt some of the sad consequences

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quences of his youthful sins, and it is probable that he feared still more and worse. The bare remembrance of sin is one sad effect of it; but then it is the fear of the future consequences of sin, which makes the present remembrance so bitter and tormenting. Was there no punishment of sin to be feared hereafter, the review of it would not much disquiet the conscience of the sinner; but it is a sense of guilt, and fear of future punishment, which chiefly makes the remembrance of sin bitter to the sinner's conscience. Here let us consider, a little more particularly, what the consequences of sin are, and are like to be, and especially of the iniquities of youth; both in this life, and in that which is to come.

First, In this life, the consequence of youthful sins is often very sad, both as to the outward, and inward man, body, and soul.

1.) As to the body, and worldly estate; both of them are many times wasted, and ruined by the iniquities of youth. When the young prodigal had given up the reins to his lusts, and devoted himself to unlawful pleasures, the sad consequence soon appeared; for in a short time, he had wasted his estate, and reduced himself to beggary, contempt, and wretchedness: a lively emblem this, of many an unhappy young man. How often has the health of the body been broken, for all a man's life, by the debaucheries of youth! If the young debauchee lives to be old, which rarely happens, he has laid in a store of growing infirmities, which will make his old age doubly uncomfortable; and, what is worse still, will perhaps intail diseases and pains on his posterity after him. Add to this the *shame* that frequently follows upon the sins of youth, and
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sticks by a man as long as he lives; according to that of *Solomon, Prov. vi. 33.* which he speaks in reference to one particular sin, *viz.* that of uncleanness, but may be applied to many others, *A wound and dishonour shall he get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away.* It would be endless to reckon up all the mischievous consequences of youthful sins to the body, and estate, and to the circumstances of this present life. Now men may be said to possess the sins of their youth, so long as they feel, and suffer the woful consequences of them.

2.) The effects of youthful sins are, many times, still more sad as to the *soul* or inward man. Hereby the nobler faculties are debased and spoiled. Many a brisk and lively young man has sotted and debauched himself, into a creature, little better than a brute. By that time he has come to manly years, when he should have been most fit for business, he has been good for just nothing. And, what is worse than all this, the indulging of youthful lusts tends to harden the conscience, and to render an after repentance next to impossible, for *can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? then may they also do good that are accustomed to do evil,* Jer. xiii. 23. Or suppose God should work such a miracle of grace, on one whose younger years have been foully stained with sin, yet then, as I have observed before, the remembrance of youthful sins will be apt to sadden the heart, and perhaps make the man uncomfortable as long as he lives. Many a true penitent has, in this sense, possessed the iniquities of his youth, and mourned over them to his dying-day. But let us go farther, and

Secondly, Take a short view of the dreadful consequences and punishment of youthful sins in the
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next world. We are assured in the word of God that these shall be brought into the account of the great day, and that men shall be judged for the iniquities of their youth, as well as for the sins of their riper years. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment, Eccles. xi. 9. God shall bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing whether it be good or evil; Eccles. xii. 14.* Those secret sins and follies of youth, which a man would not for the world that they should be known, for they would ruin his reputation, and make him ashamed to shew his head; all these, if they are not repented of, and pardoned, will ere long be published and known to all the world. Conscience may be so hardened by youthful sins, as that for the present they may give the sinner no disturbance; but, alas! conscience is only laid asleep for a time, it will surely rouse and wake another day; and will be in the sinner's breast like a gnawing worm that will never die, or a fire that can never be quenched. O! think young sinner, before thou venturest to indulge thy youthful lusts any more, stop, and bethink thyself of this after reckoning, think of eternity. Art thou afraid of the austeries of a religious life, of a little present mortification, and self-denial? But think, what it will be to endure the pains of *hell* for ever: art thou afraid of being laughed at, and being made the jest of thy companions, shouldst thou reform, and set thy heart to religion? But think, what it will be to be made the scorn of *Devils*, thine everlasting tormenters: dost thou prefer thy sensual appetites to God and thy soul?

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foul? wilt thou eat and drink with the drunken? Remember the rich glutton in *hell*, how he is tormented in those flames, and not a drop of water to cool his tongue: remember that all this, and infinitely more, and worse than we can describe, or conceive, all this will be eternal. Know therefore, O young man, know and consider it, while thou art indulging thy youthful lusts, *that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment*; and if thou dost not repent of the iniquities of thy youth, thou wilt be made to possess them in the bitter remembrance, and pain, and punishment to all eternity.

Thus I have explained the text; what remains, is that we endeavour to make some suitable and practical improvement of it.

First, Let us again remark, what I hinted in the beginning of this discourse, *viz.* that youth is no sufficient excuse for sinning. We are apt to make very light of the sins of youth, they are *tricks of youth*, we say; but our text calls them by another name, they are *the iniquities of youth*. *Job* was made to know, that they are not such light matters as they are commonly thought to be; for the remembrance of his youthful sins sat heavy on his conscience, now in his advanced years. Know, O young men! that *God* requires and expects duty from you, and that your sins are as provoking to *God*, as any others; and if they are not repented of, and pardoned through the merits of *Christ*, you will surely be condemned for them, and doomed to endless misery. It will be no excuse to say, at the last day, they were tricks of youth; for let them be committed when they will, they were *iniquities* and *sins* against *God*, and, as such, they deserve the

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torments of *hell* for ever. Nay it will be so far from a reasonable excuse, that they were committed in youth, that this is rather a grievous aggravation of them. It is certain that youthful sins have some peculiar aggravations, more than the sins of our advanced years are commonly attended with, I will instance in these *two*.

1.) Youth is that time of life, in which we ordinarily receive the greatest favours and blessings from *God*; and therefore the sins of youth have more of *ingratitude* in them than other sins. By the sins of youth, methinks, we fly more directly in the face of the goodness and kindness of *God*, than by the sins of old age. For we have then but lately received our being from *God*; and shall we so soon forget our Maker, and turn rebels against him, and affront him to his face? The time of youth, is a time of much love from *God* to us, and shall it be the time of our hatred and contempt of *God*? *God* forbid! Shall I help you to reckon up some of the favours and mercies of *God* to you in your younger years? (they are many of them peculiar and distinguishing mercies.)

It is not long ago since *God* made you, and made you reasonable creatures: his providence has guarded you from a thousand dangers in your infant state, such as many others have fallen by: it was a very gracious disposal of providence towards many of you, that you were born of godly parents, and have been blessed with a religious education, and have had better means of salvation than hundreds and thousands of young persons in the world: you have always had good examples set before you, while many other children could learn nothing from their parents but sin and wickedness: you have had
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many earnest prayers put up for you, by your good parents: you are encouraged to go to *God*, as your parents *God*, and to hope that he will be your *God* too. Again, as to the blessings of providence, how have you been favoured! how have you been distinguished from others! how many poor children do you see about the streets, begging their bread, and hardly with clothes to cover them! Consider, this might have been your case. Let me tell you farther, that now in your youth is, in all probability, the most pleasant and easy part of all your lives: though I hardly expect to be believed by young persons when I say this; they are apt to expect mighty things in the world, and from the world, when they are once their own masters; but I am well persuaded that the time of youth is, generally speaking, the easiest and pleasantest part of life. This is the time in which providence does remarkably smile on you; and can this be the proper time for your sinning against *God*? can it be any excuse of sin that it was committed in youth? no, so much the worse, there was so much the more ingratitude in it, and so much the more contempt of the goodness and kindness of *God*, and so much the sadder abuse of his rich and distinguishing mercy: surely you can never be under greater obligations to holiness and obedience to *God* than now. Let me add this one thing farther, that the time of youth is generally the time in which *God* is striving with sinners by his *Spirit*: the great and blessed *God* seems to bear a special favourable regard to young people, for he ordinarily follows them with the strivings of his *Spirit*, more than he doth old sinners: it has been the observation, and the experience of all ages, that by far the greatest number

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of true converts are converted in their younger years. I would ask my young friends, has not the blessed *God* been striving with you, one time, and another, under this, and that sermon, and wooing you, as it were, to become his, and to come under the bonds of his covenant? and will you, in despite of all his kindness, yet go on to indulge youthful lusts, and dishonour *God* and rebel against him? Or, will you not reckon yourselves to be under peculiarly strong obligations, now in your youth, to remember *God* your Creator, and to become his dutiful and obedient children?

2.) The time of youth is that time in which we may do most for *God*. It is the fittest time of all to set about religion, and to enter on *God's* service, because then most may be done for his honour and glory. Now whilst your natural powers and faculties are strong and lively, and before you are encumbered with the cares and hurries of life; now is your time to do *God* service, and to mind the great concern of all, and secure the one thing needful. When you come to stoop under the infirmities of old age, you will find that little can be done then for *God* and your souls: the hurries and the business of middle age will, it may be, leave but little time for religion: youth is the time to serve the *Lord*; and can it ever then be an excuse for a wicked life, that the sinner was but young? No surely, but quite otherwise. As early piety is peculiarly pleasing to *God*, so the iniquities of youth are peculiarly provoking to him: he made even his beloved *Job* to possess the iniquities of his youth, when it does not appear, that the sins of his after life were impressed with such bitterness on his conscience. O Sirs! never make light of youthful

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ful sins; *God* does not make light of them, and you will not make light of them another day. But let us come to another use,

Secondly, If it be so sad to possess the iniquities of youth, how dreadful must it be to possess all the sins and iniquities of a long life! let sinners of an advanced age consider this: they have not only the sins of youth, but the sins of forty, or fifty, or threescore years, or more, to answer for at the bar of *God*. O! what a dreadful long reckoning will you have when the day of judgment comes? how bitter will it be to possess, and to suffer the punishment of a long life of sin and iniquity? But I will return to address myself to young persons,

Thirdly, Let me exhort you now, as one that loves you, and wishes your good, let me intreat you to be laying up a better portion against old age than the iniquities of youth; and that is by devoting your early years to *God* and his service. You have heard, in some measure, what a sad portion the iniquities of youth will prove; how they will be apt to make you unhappy throughout life, uncomfortable in your old age, and miserable for ever; it will be a bitter thing, whether in time or eternity, to be made to possess the iniquities of your youth: on the other hand early piety will lay a good foundation of a comfortable life; if you have always peace with *God*, and the testimony of a good conscience, then let the world go how it will, you can never be very unhappy; you may *eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, when God hath accepted you*, Eccles. ix. 7. This will also lay a foundation for a comfortable death, and, what is more than all, for a joyful and glorious eternity. Now, Sirs, is your time to begin

gin to be happy, and sure that cannot be begun too soon. O that it might be this very day! would you begin this day to live to *God*, I would not only wish you, but I would venture to promise you a *happy new year*. Then let what will come, let death itself come, yet you are happy, you are made for ever.

I leave this matter with you, and to your serious reflections, and will only farther hint two or three directions before I conclude. If you would not be made to possess the iniquities of your youth hereafter, then

1.) Endeavour to get them pardoned while you are young. For this you must fly to *Christ*, and lay hold on his righteousness by faith, to justify your guilty souls: you must accept of him and consent to him, who is your only propitiation and peace-maker with an offended *God*.

2.) Endeavour also to get your lusts subdued and mortified, and your souls really sanctified. You must be regenerate, and born again, and become new creatures, and holy creatures; or it will be altogether impossible, either that *God* should love you, while you are in this world, or receive you to his presence hereafter: for *without holiness no man can see the Lord*. For this you must earnestly beg and implore the assistance of divine grace, to *cleanse you from all your filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to inable you to perfect holiness in the fear of God*.

3.) Habituate yourselves to acts of religion and piety while you are young. Use, we commonly say, is a second nature, and old customs are hardly broke, whether they are good or bad. Thus the early practice of religion will make it become easy, and

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and in a manner natural to you, in your riper and advanced years. Those duties of self-denial, which at first you may find somewhat difficult, will by use and practice become not only very tolerable, but very comfortable; the resisting of temptations will be easier work every day than other; prayer will become in a short time the natural language and breath of your souls, and you will find your hearts more and more ready to every good work. Thus religion and piety will grow up in you, as you advance in years; you will not have the iniquities of youth to imbitter your future days; then every new year that comes can bring you nothing but good, and every one will bring you nearer to *heaven*, and the full enjoyment of the consummate happiness of holy souls.



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S E R M O N III.

The happy change; or, the profit of
piety.

PHILEMON, verses 10, 11.

*I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom
I have begotten in my bonds: which in
time past was to thee unprofitable, but
now profitable to thee and to me.*

THESE words are part of a short letter written by the Apostle *Paul* to *Philemon*, on a particular occasion. It is not very certain who this *Philemon* was, any farther than that he was a christian, probably a man of some note: some have judged him to be a minister in the church at *Coloss*, because the Apostle salutes him with the title of his fellow labourer (*συνεργός*) verse 1. but this will not prove that he was a minister, since in other places, it is certain that private christians, and even women, who some way or other served and promoted the cause of christianity, are stiled by the Apostle his fellow labourers, or helpers; thus *Rom. xvi. 3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers (συνεργούς) in Christ Jesus.* The occasion of *Paul's* writing this letter

letter to *Philemon* was this. *Onesimus* a servant to *Philemon* had robbed his master, and run away from him; in his rambles he came to *Rome*, where *Paul* was at that time a prisoner for the gospel, and where providentially coming under this Apostle's preaching, he was, by the blessing of *God*, converted by it; upon which *Paul* sends him back to his master, with this letter, to testify the truth of his conversion, and to intreat his master *Philemon* to pardon him, and receive him again into his family.

This epistle, though short, and though writ on such a particular occasion, is well worthy of a place in the sacred canon; for it contains many profitable instructions, which are of general use: as, That no true christian though of the meanest rank and worldly condition, is to be despised. Here we have a whole epistle in the book of *God*, writ in favour of poor *Onesimus*, a fugitive slave, but now a gospel penitent. Grace enobles the meanest servant, and renders him worthy to be loved and respected by christians of the highest honour: with what affection and respect does the great Apostle *Paul* now speak of *Onesimus*! he calls him *his son and his bowels*.

We have likewise, in this epistle, a memorable instance of the richness and freeness of the grace of *God*, for the encouragement of the meanest and vilest sinners to fly to him for mercy. Some have interpreted this epistle in an allusive way, applying it to the mediation and intercession of *Christ* for poor sinners: we were like *Onesimus*, revolters from *God's* service, and had injured him in his rights; *Jesus Christ* finds us, and by his grace makes a change in us, and then intercedes for us with the *Father*, that we may be received into his favour and

and family again. We may farther learn from this epistle, with what affection and joy true penitents should be embraced by the friends of *Christ*; there should be joy on earth, as well as there is in *heaven*, over a sinner that repenteth; and we should be ready to serve the interest of such persons all that we can. *Paul* concerns himself even for the temporal, as well as for the spiritual interest of *Onesimus*, and writes to his master to intreat for his pardon, and kind reception. These and other useful instructions are to be learned from this epistle. In that part of it which I have chose for my text, we have an account of the conversion of *Onesimus*, and the happy change that was hereby made in him, from a worthless and unprofitable wretch, to be a very useful and profitable person; in which *Onesimus* may be considered as an emblem of every true convert.

In this account, you may take particular notice of *four* things.

First, *Onesimus's* former state and character before his conversion, *which in time past was to thee unprofitable*. He was, it seems, a bad young man; a bad servant to his master, as well as wicked towards *God*. However it is worth our observing here, how gently, and tenderly the Apostle touches upon his former bad character, and behaviour, *he was to thee unprofitable*. He might, to be sure, have said a great deal more and worse of him than this; for there is a hint, *verse 18*. that *Onesimus* had wronged his master. *If he hath wronged thee; or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account*. It seems he had been thievish, as well as idle, injurious to his master, as well as unprofitable; but the Apostle chooses to speak in the softest manner he could of his former wickedness: he will say no more of him

positively than this, that *in time past he had been unprofitable*; for he would have all Onesimus's former crimes to be forgotten, now he had repented of them, and God had forgiven them. Here the goodness of God should be our pattern; he is said to *blot out the iniquities* of those whom he forgives, and *he will not remember their sins*, Isaiah xliii. 25. that is, he will no more charge them in judgment; no, nor so much as upbraid the true penitent with them, than if he had quite forgotten them. I have heard it said in the case of some injury received. "I'll *forgive him, but I will never forget him*;" but this is not God-like, for when he forgives he forgets too; so should we do, we should not only forgive, but forget, as much as possible, the former crimes of those whom God has forgiven. Thus Paul draws a veil over the faults of Onesimus; he would not have it so much as mentioned now, how vile and injurious he had been; only he is forced to say, that *in time past he had been unprofitable*, which was the softest thing he could say, to say any thing.

Secondly, We observe, how much Onesimus was now changed and altered for the better: *which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me*. Here was a blessed change indeed; of bad he was become good, and of unprofitable he was become very useful; and such is the change which the grace of God makes in every true convert. *He is now profitable*, says the Apostle, *to thee and to me*. He was profitable to the Apostle as a seal to his ministry, and so a great comfort and encouragement to him in his work; for nothing more strengthens the hands, and encourages the hearts of faithful ministers, than to see their ministry made successful in the conversion of sinners by it: and

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Philemon, his master, might depend upon it, that if he now received him into his family again, he would prove another sort of a servant than what he had been, for he was now become another sort of a man; he had been unprofitable, but now he will be profitable. Those who are good towards *God*, will be good towards men. True religion will make people good in every respect, and in every relation; it will make good masters, and good servants, good husbands, and good wives, good parents, and good children; there is no other security like it, that persons will prove good in their respective relations. *Paul* durst answer for *Onesimus* that he would prove a good servant, now he was become a good man.

There is a common complaint now-a-days of bad servants, "Never were servants at such a pass as now." Perhaps it may be so, I cannot tell; but if it is, I am afraid the fault lies very much at the door of masters and mistresses; it is because they take so little care of the religion of their servants and families. You are content that they should be ignorant and wicked towards *God*, and then expect that they should be good and faithful to you; 'tis a thing not to be expected: while *Onesimus* was wicked, he was bad to his master, and you must not ordinarily expect better of wicked servants. You complain of bad servants, I'll tell you the way, the best and surest way in the world, to have good ones; set up the worship of *God* in all your families, pray with them, catechise and instruct them in religion, speak to them seriously about their souls, do but take pains to make them good towards *God*, and, if once you gain that point, you may depend upon it, they will be good servants to you. True reli-

gion will certainly make them both faithful and profitable; such servants will make conscience of their time and trust, and of their master's interest, as much as their own.

I would observe one thing more under this head, *viz.* that christianity does not impair the power of masters over their servants. *Christ's* doctrine and *Paul's* doctrine is no levelling doctrine, which would make all men equal as to their worldly condition. It teaches masters to be good to their servants, and it teaches servants to be good, and obedient, and faithful to their masters; but it no where teaches that masters, and servants are to be equals in social and civil life. Though *Onesimus* was now converted, and become *Christ's* free-man, he was *Philemon's* servant for all that, and was still bound to serve his master faithfully, and to make satisfaction too for the wrong and injury which he had formerly done him.

Thirdly, We are farther to observe in our text, what it was that made this mighty and happy change in this young man; and it was this, that *he had been begotten by the Apostle Paul in his bonds.* That is, he had been converted by his preaching and ministry. Though it is, properly, *God's* work to regenerate any sinner, yet it is sometimes ascribed to men too, because they are the instruments of dispensing the grace of *God* by the preaching of his gospel: *They are ministers by whom sinners are brought to believe, even as the Lord gives to every man,* 1 Cor. iii. 5. And it is a mighty encouragement and comfort to faithful ministers, when *God* is pleased to give his seal to their ministry, and sinners are begotten and born again by their preaching. It was with vast pleasure and thankfulness that *Paul* could

could say of *Onesimus*, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

The Greek word, which is here translated *begotten*, is the same which is elsewhere rendered *born*, as particularly in the third chapter of *John*, ver. 3, 6, 7. both there, and in our text, it imports the conversion of a sinner; or that mighty change which is wrought by the grace of God in the souls of all that are saved. Once more,

Fourthly, You may observe in our text, what an endearing relation was consequent hereupon, betwixt *Paul* and his convert, and how the Apostle loved him. *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus*. In the same sense, he calls *Timothy* his own son, because he had been the instrument of his conversion, 1 *Tim.* i. 2. And thus he also claims the relation of a spiritual father to the multitude of *Corinthian* believers, 1 *Cor.* iv. 15. *Though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*. He had been the happy instrument of their new birth, and upon that account he claimed the relation of a father to them, and felt the bowels of a father for them. There commonly is, and 'tis but reasonable there should be, an endeared affection betwixt faithful ministers and such as have been converted by their ministry: they will love like parents and children. We cannot but love those, as our children, whom we have begotten to God through the gospel; they are the seals of our ministry, our joy and our crown: and it is but a reasonable respect and love, which such persons usually bear to their ministers, who have been made the instruments to them of so great and good a work. With what concern and tenderness does the Apostle *Paul*

here speak of his young convert! *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus.*

And thus I have explained this text, and the several things which are contained in it. I shall take up the rest of the time in discoursing on this plain observation from it,

That regeneration changes an unprofitable sinner into a profitable saint.

The method of discourse shall be,

I. To give you a short account of regeneration; or shew you what it is to be begotten or born again.

II. To shew you what a change this will make as to a person's usefulness: he, that was before an unprofitable wretch, will now become a very profitable and useful person.

I. I shall give you a short account of regeneration, that great and most necessary change which must pass upon every one of us, if ever we are saved, *Verily, verily*, said Christ, *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*, John iii. 3. He hath said this, who is the only Saviour, and who has an undoubted right to fix and declare the terms on which alone he will save any sinner: and *he* hath said this, who is to be our judge, and who will stand to what he hath said in the last day, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see, he shall not enter, into the kingdom of God*. All that I shall attempt on this head, in the present discourse, is only to explain this metaphor in our text, and shew you, what is meant by our being *begotten*, or, which is all one, being *born again*. And by this metaphor, I apprehend, the following particulars are naturally suggested to us.

1.) That

1.) That it is something which is above, or out of, our own power to do for ourselves. This is the constant language and sense of scripture about this matter; so much is clearly implied in most of the metaphors and allusions whereby it is represented in the word of God. Thus, it is called *our being created in Christ Jesus*; which implies almighty power to effect it. It is *our being made new creatures*; our being *quickned*, and *raised to newness of life*, even as *Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father*: and with all these, the metaphor in our text perfectly agrees, to signify that we are not sufficient to regenerate ourselves, but that if ever this work be wrought, it must be done by the power and grace of God: for it is our being *begotten or born again*, to intimate that a man can no more regenerate himself, than he could beget himself; he can no more restore a spiritual life to his dead soul, than he could animate and enliven his dead body when it was forming in the womb; but it is the same Almighty Power which gave us life at first, that must restore this new life to us. *He made us and not we ourselves*: and those who are regenerate, are equally *God's workmanship both as men, and as saints, of his own will begat he us*, James i. 18. and *we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus*, Ephes. ii. 10.

2.) Regeneration makes a very great and real change in the soul where it is wrought; even as if a man was to be begotten and born anew. It is therefore also called a *new creating*, and it is compared to the resurrection of a dead body, which makes a vast alteration and change in it. *You hath he quickned, who were dead in trespasses and sins*, Ephes. ii. 1. There is as great a change wrought when a sinner is made a saint, as when a clod of

earth is made a living man. It is such a change as very much resembles the first creation of this world, when light was brought out of darkness, and harmony out of confusion ; so, *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new*, 2 Cor. v. 17.

3.) Regeneration is the beginning of a new life in the soul. As the natural conception and birth is the beginning of the natural life, so this new birth is the beginning of a new and spiritual life. Thus it is said of the Prodigal in the parable, upon his conversion, *this my son was dead, and is alive*. Before this change is wrought in us, we are but as dead men, with respect to spiritual matters ; but in regeneration there is a new and divine life communicated to the soul by the *Spirit of God* : that is, new principles of life and action are infused, and implanted, to which we are naturally strangers : and as we have new principles to act from, so we have new powers to act by, and new ends that we shall aim at ; and then it is that we begin to live to purpose. Hereby we are said *to be made partakers of a divine nature*, 2 Pet. i. 4. Not the essential nature of God (which it is impossible that any mere creature should partake of) but the moral perfections of God are communicated to the soul in regeneration : thus there is an impress of the wisdom of God upon the mind, and of the purity and holiness of God upon the heart ; and so the regenerate soul *is renewed after the image of him that created him*. Regeneration chiefly consists in this, *viz.* the infusing of new and spiritual principles of life and action into the souls of men. This is what is called *the seed of God which remaineth in believers*, and is the true spring and cause of every good and gracious habit, and of every good and holy act. But 4.) By

4.) By regeneration sinners are also brought into a new relation to the blessed God. As by the natural birth we become nearly related to our earthly parents, so by this new and spiritual birth, we become nearly related to God our heavenly Father. He is the parent of this divine birth, for *of his own will begat he us*; and he will readily own all regenerate persons for his children, *as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God*, John i. 12. Which, by the way, supposes that by nature we were not God's children, for we have forfeited all the blessings and privileges of such a relation to the blessed God; *we are alienated in our minds by wicked works*, and deserve not to be called God's children any more. But now regeneration constitutes a new relation betwixt God and sinners; as he has begotten them of his own will, and after his own image, he is not ashamed to own them for his children, and he will not be backward to give them the portion of children in his own family: Upon this God the Father becomes our reconciled God and Father, Jesus Christ becomes our brother and friend, all the saints become one family, and all the servants of the family become attendants on the children; the angels of God are *ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation*, Heb. i. 14. Once more,

5.) it must be owned, after all, that regeneration is a secret and mysterious thing. To this we may apply that text, *Eccles. xi. 5. As thou knowest not how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, so thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit*. We are very certain of the natural birth, that there is such a thing, and that children are born into the world daily; but we do not know how it is, that the *fœtus* is formed, and animated, and how

the natural life begins, this is a mystery in nature : so we are certain of the new birth, and that regeneration is a real thing, good people have experienced the reality of it in their own souls, and they will never be disputed not bantered out of the belief of it, *they speak that they do know, and testify that they have seen*, and felt in themselves ; but yet they do not know how this new birth was brought about ; for it was by a secret influence of the Spirit of God, that the principles of a divine life were infused into their dead souls : and much more is this a secret to the carnal world, and will for ever continue so, *for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolish to him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*, 1 Cor. ii. 14. The difference which regeneration makes betwixt one and another is not, indeed, visible to common observers, *The world knoweth not Christ's disciples*, nor will it ever be fully known, how vastly regenerate souls differ from all others, till that day comes, when all secret things shall be brought to light ; when the saints shall be purified from all their corruptions, and shall shine out with unmixed glory. This is all I shall speak at present concerning the nature of the new birth. I come now,

II. To shew you how great a change this will make as to a person's usefulness. He, that before was an unprofitable wretch, will now become a very profitable and useful person. *Who in time past was unprofitable*, says Paul of Onesimus, and the same may truly be said of every unregenerate person in the world ; but *now is profitable*, being regenerate and become a good man, he is also become a very useful man. *He is profitable to thee, and to me,*

me, and to all that he has any concern with: the same may be truly said of every regenerate person in the world. I shall endeavour to make out the truth of this observation; and I would propose it as an argument for religion to all, especially to young persons, that it will make them useful, and truly valuable; whereas without this, whatever other accomplishments they may have, they are but unprofitable creatures. As to worldly matters, indeed, a worldly man may do as well as any, and perhaps better than a good man; he may do well for himself, and well for his family, *The children of this world are often wiser in their generation than the children of light.* An unregenerate man may, no doubt, be a useful neighbour, and a profitable member of the commonwealth: the best patriots are not always the best men; *Pharaoh* was a good friend to *Joseph*, and a useful instrument of succouring the church of *God* in those days, though he was no member of that church himself, but an heathen and idolater. In mere worldly matters, worldly men may be as useful and profitable as any; but there are greater matters than these, other affairs and concerns for men to mind and manage, which are of infinitely greater moment, and weight, and value; and here the sinner is good for nothing, he is a mere useless and unprofitable creature. As for instance,

1.) He is unprofitable to his Maker, for he by no means answers the end for which *God* made him. The father saith of the prodigal, in the parable, *this my son was lost.* He was lost, like a sheep that is strayed from the fold and flock, and is no longer of any use and advantage to the shepherd or owner. Thus all natural men are gone astray like a lost sheep:

sheep : they are lost as to *God*, and to all that service which he expects from them, and the use which he made them for. The Creator reaps no tribute of glory from these his apostate creatures ; and the merciful Redeemer, who has shed his blood for lost sinners, receives no honour from them, while they continue in an unregenerate state. Thus, unconverted sinners are unprofitable unto *God*.

2.) They are unprofitable even to themselves ; for *what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?* says Christ, *Matt. xvi. 26.* The loss of the soul is an unspeakable loss, which no worldly gain can any ways compensate. He that loses his soul, though it be to gain the whole world, makes a sad bargain for himself, and will sit down a miserable loser in the end. And what then will all the sinner's profit amount to ? let him be never so rich, and prosperous, and successful in the world, yet alas ! he is like to lose his soul ; and when he comes to ballance the account at last, and to compare his profit and his loss, he will find that, with all his gains, he has lived most unprofitably to himself, for he has lost his soul, and no worldly profits are to be named with that : that is a loss never to be repaired, never to be retrieved.

3.) Unregenerate sinners are, in many respects, unprofitable to their fellow-creatures. They do not that good to others which they might do ; they might recommend religion, and do something towards saving the souls of their carnal relations, and friends, and neighbours ; but alas ! they do nothing of all this. They are of no use in the *Lord's* vineyard. How unprofitable are wicked children, for instance, to the comfort of their godly parents ? who have taken much pains to instruct them, and have

have put up many fervent prayers for them, and hoped for a comfortable harvest of all, that is, to see their children prove good; but alas! if they prove wicked, their parents are sadly disappointed; then their pains and prayers are lost; they are frustrated of what they hoped for, and wished for, above all things in the world, for their dear children. 'Tis a sad uncomfortable fight for a godly parent to look upon a wicked child, however beautiful, however, in other respects, lovely.

Thus, on all accounts, unregenerate sinners are like *Onesimus* before his conversion, *unprofitable creatures*. Nay the parallel will hold farther still. *Onesimus* had not only been unprofitable to his master, but injurious, he had wronged him and defrauded him; and so are all sinful men, not only unprofitable, but injurious too: they rob *God* of his rights, of that homage and honour which is due to him as their *Maker* and *Lord*: they not only neglect, but they *wrong their own souls*, Prov. viii. 36. They are not only unprofitable to the spiritual good of others, but, oftentimes, very mischievous, by their bad examples encouraging sin, and leading others the way to *hell* and destruction. The wicked children of godly parents are not only unprofitable to their parents comfort, but are, many times, the very breaking of their heart; it brings down their hoary heads with sorrow to the grave, to see their children prove profligate and vile, rebels to *God*, and, in all probability, children of perdition. Thus I have shewed you how unregenerate persons are unprofitable, and worse than so.

Let us now see, on the other hand, how far the parallel will hold betwixt *Onesimus* the penitent and convert, and every other regenerate person. Though

in time past he was unprofitable, yet now, upon his conversion, he was become a very profitable and useful person. Such is the happy change which converting grace always makes ; it turns an unprofitable sinner, into a profitable saint. We will go over those particulars again, which have been mentioned before, and shew you, what a blessed change the grace of God will make, as to every one of them.

1.) Whereas the sinner was in time past unprofitable to his *Maker* and *Redeemer*, like a straying sheep lost out of the fold, he is now brought back again, *This my son was lost and is found*. He will now devote himself, in good earnest, to the service of God, and will endeavour to *glorify him with his body and his spirit, which are his* ; from henceforth God shall have the principal use of all his faculties and powers, and of his time, and all his talents. *O Lord ! truly I am thy servant ; I am thy servant ; for thou hast loosed my bonds*, Psalm cxvi. 16. so speaks the regenerate soul, “ Thou hast loosed my “ bonds, wherewith *Satan* had bound me for these “ many years, thy free grace has saved me from “ destruction. *Lord* I am thine, wholly, and intirely, and for ever thine.” Such persons are very profitable to the *Redeemer’s* interest and glory ; in them he sees the travel of his soul, and the glorious fruit of his purchase and death, and rejoices in them, and rejoices over them : these will be the eternal monuments of the riches and power of his glorious grace ; for *Christ shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe*, 2 Thes. i. 10. Thus, regenerate persons become profitable to God, their *Creator* and *Saviour*, as creatures can be.

2.) Whereas

2.) Whereas in time past they lived unprofitably to themselves, there is now a blessed change in this respect also. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself*, says Solomon, Prov. ix. 12. Such as are wise and good towards God, act most wisely for their own interest; they are safe and secure in the arms of providence, amidst a thousand dangers which terrify and distress the wicked. They have nothing reasonably to fear, who have the mighty God of Jacob for their refuge and portion. Let what will come, let what will happen; yet this is promised them, and this they can depend upon, that *all things shall work together for the good of them that love God*. And could I tell you farther, could I make you understand, what the inward spiritual comforts of religion are, what peace of conscience, and joy in the *Holy Ghost*, and the witness and sealing of the spirit means; you would all be convinced and own, that he only lives profitably to himself and to his own comfort, who lives to God. And could I carry your views, a step farther, into the heavenly world, and give you a prospect of the future inheritance of the saints; it would make you even despise all the trash of worldly pleasure. One believing thought of *heaven*, would put this truth out of all dispute; that they only are wise for themselves, who are wise for salvation.

3.) Regenerate persons are, in many respects, profitable to their fellow-creatures. These are the most useful persons in the places where they live. If the world despises and hates them, surely, it is because it knows them not; for it is for their sakes that the world itself stands so long, and that many wicked cities and countries are not destroyed. If Lot had not dwelt in Sodom, probably Sodom would have

have been laid in ashes sooner, and if there had been but *ten* good people, such as *Lot* was, in all that wicked city, it should not have been destroyed at all ; but *God* would have spared it for *ten's* sake. Little do wicked men, who hate *God's* people, think how much they owe of their preservation and prosperity, many times, to these dwelling amongst them. *God* blessed and prospered the whole family where *Joseph* lived, for *Joseph's* sake : he was, surely, the most useful member in all the family ; and so are *God's* children wherever they dwell : they are profitable to their wicked neighbours even by their presence ; and they are more so by their prayers : many publick judgments have been averted, and many publick blessings have been obtained, for cities and kingdoms, by the prayers of *God's* people who dwelt there. Thus *Elias*, by his prayer, obtained rain from *heaven* after a three years drought on the whole land of *Israel*. Farther, good people are profitable by their holy examples, by their serious reproofs, and counsels, and by their charities and good works ; by these they adorn the doctrine of *God* their *Saviour*, and recommend religion to the esteem of men : and sometimes by these, they have been the instruments of the greatest good to their carnal neighbours and friends, even of their conversion and eternal salvation. I will add yet farther, under this head, that as the wicked children of good parents are most unprofitable to their parents joy ; so when such are converted, they are the most profitable in this respect ; then they fill the hearts of their good parents with gladness. There is hardly any joy, or comfort in this world like it, to see our dear children become *God's* children. When the Prodigal turned penitent, O what

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a comfort was it to his aged father! how does he run to meet him, and embrace him with open arms, and falls upon his neck and kisses him, in a transport of joy, to find his wicked son now become a new creature! Children, would you give your parents joy and comfort? would you some way compensate all their labour, and pains, and sorrow, and care on your account? this is the way, give yourselves to God; nothing will be so profitable to their comfort, as well as yours. The Prodigal's return spread joy through all the family, the servants as well as the father greatly rejoiced in it: so, it may be said, upon the new birth of a sinner, as the Angel said to *Zacharias* concerning the birth of his son *John*, *Thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth.* All the servants in God's family will rejoice with you, and rejoice over you; good parents will rejoice; faithful ministers will rejoice; your conversion will be vastly profitable to them, for it is their greatest encouragement and comfort in their work to find their ministry blessed for the conversion of sinners: the very Angels in *heaven* will rejoice: the good news of your conversion will soon reach their world, and spread a universal new joy through all those happy regions. *There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth,* Luke xv. 10. They are glad of so happy a change, and rejoice to see such an unprofitable wretch become so profitable and excellent a creature.

Thus I have cleared up the doctrine which I raised from my text, *viz.* that regeneration changes an unprofitable sinner into a profitable saint. It now remains that we make some practical application of this subject. As

1.) I would intreat such as have been made partakers of regenerating grace, to consider, and remember, what is expected from them. It is expected, yea God expects it, that you should live very profitably: you have received greater mercies than others, and you are intrusted with greater talents than others, *What do ye more than others?* Christ once put that question, let conscience now repeat it. "*What do I more than others?*" The "grace of God has distinguished me from thousands," "has wrought a good work in me, and begotten me again to a lively hope of eternal blessedness; but what do I do more than others? More for God's honour, and more for the salvation of my perishing fellow-creatures?" Can you, my friends, be unconcerned for perishing souls? sure you cannot. *Israel* must have compassion on strangers, because they had been strangers themselves, *Exod. xxiii. 9. Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.* So may I say to you, who have been the happy instances of the power of converting grace, ye know the heart of an unconverted sinner, and ye know what danger such a one is in; ye know by experience the folly, and the perverseness of the hearts of such persons, and how miserably *Satan* imposes upon them; O! pity their case, and labour all you can for their conversion and salvation. Can you be without a warm zeal for God's honour and glory, by whose mercy and kindness you have been so wonderfully, distinguished? should you not labour with double diligence to be profitable to his interest now, since in time past ye were so unprofitable?

2.) I

2.) I would take an occasion from what has been offered, to recommend true godliness to all, and especially to young persons, whose benefit I have chiefly aimed at in this discourse. You are now in your chusing time, and, most probably, the choice which you now make, will fix you for life, and fix you for eternity. It commonly proves so; men seldom change much when they grow into years: it is certain there are few, very few instances of old converts. Well, and what will you now chuse? will you chuse to live unprofitably, and die eternally, to be mere cumber-grounds on *God's* earth, and lose your souls at last? *God* forbid! and yet this will be the case if you live in sin, and continue in your natural state. With all your accomplishments you will be but useless and worthless creatures. You will neither be profitable to *God*, nor yourselves, nor others; and then, what were you made for? What account will you have to give of yourselves at the great day? But I would fain hope better things of you, you who are now in the bloom of life; you are the hope of the world, and the hope of families, and the hope of the churches of *Christ*: there is something very pleasant and taking in youth, which makes almost all persons love you; we cannot but wish you well, and should be very glad to see you do well; O! do not disappoint the fond wishes and hopes of your parents and friends. And now, if you would live usefully, and profitably, and die comfortably too, and be happy for ever; you must chuse the *Lord* for your *God*, and *Christ* for your *Saviour*, and you must chuse the ways of godliness for your practice; you must be converted and born again, and, surely, the sooner the better. Consider what wretched unprofitable creatures

creatures you are 'till that great work is done; but that, and that alone, will make you truly lovely, and greatly valuable and useful; it will recommend you both to *God*, and angels, and men: it will make you very profitable while you live, and it will lay a sure foundation of your everlasting happiness when time shall be no more. Therefore, to close all, cry mightily to *God* for converting grace. 'Tis true (as I have shewed you before) you cannot convert yourselves; but *God* can do it, and he has promised that *He will give his Spirit to them that ask him. He hath said, that He hath no pleasure at all that the wicked should die, but had rather they should turn and live.* Never doubt his willingness, therefore; if you are but willing, *God* is willing, and then the work shall soon be done, and the happy change shall soon be wrought.

Let me recommend it to you, farther, that you would diligently attend on the means of grace, and especially, on the preaching of *God's* word, which is the ordinary standing means of conversion and salvation. *Faith cometh by hearing.* The poor cripples who could not heal themselves, could lie at the pool, where *God* did sometimes heal miraculously; so you may lie at the pool, as it were, and wait upon *God* in his appointed means, and there you may hope for the blessing of his grace; then it will be but a reasonable hope, that *God* will be pleased to beget you to himself by the word of his grace. By all means take heed of stifling convictions, if at any time the good *Spirit* of *God* is at work upon you. *Quench not the Spirit*, lest he should be grieved and depart from you, and you should hear from him no more, but be delivered up (as some sinners have been) to a hard heart and a seared conscience.

science. And now resolve, in the strength of *Christ*, and by the assistance of the grace of *God*, that if any of you have hitherto lived unprofitably, you will from henceforth live to better purpose. O! that you would begin this new year with a hearty surrender of yourselves to *God*, and his service. This will, indeed, make it a happy, and a comfortable year to you; and nothing can possibly make it an unhappy one: afflictions cannot make it unhappy to a child of *God*, to whom all afflictions shall surely be sanctified: death itself cannot make it unhappy to an heir of glory: then the sooner you die, and leave this world, the sooner will you be where *Christ* is; and it will be a happy exchange of sin and sorrow, for perfect holiness, and everlasting joy.



S E R M O N IV.

Joshua's resolution to serve the Lord.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

*If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord ;
choose you this day whom you will serve ;
whether the gods which your fathers
served, that were on the other side of
the flood, or the gods of the Amorites,
in whose land ye dwell : but as for me
and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

A Good resolution to begin the new year with.
This text directs us to the very best choice
we can make, both for time and eternity.
Choose you this day whom you will serve, said Joshua
to the tribes of *Israel*, when they were assembled
together. I have called you together here this day,
to make the very same proposal to you, and especi-
ally to those of you who are now in the choosing
time of life, that is in your younger years ; *Choose*
you this day whom you will serve, God or the world,
Christ or *Satan*.

We are this day entering upon a *new year* ; and
now methinks it would be very proper to take it
into sober consideration, what we purpose to do this
year, if it shall please God to spare us, and what
master

master we shall resolve to serve. Would to God, we might every one take up *Joshua's* resolution in the text! *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

As for the occasion of his speaking these words, the story lies thus. After *Joshua* had safely conducted the tribes of *Israel* into the promised land, and settled them in the quiet possession of it; he was desirous also to settle them in the true religion, and confirm them in the service of God, before he died. He had always had their interest much at heart; and he well knew that this would be their best security, after he was gone: but he also knew their evil disposition to idolatry, and was much afraid, lest after he was dead, they would forsake the Lord, and turn aside after strange gods. He was willing therefore, before he died, to get their solemn promise upon it, that they would never forsake their God. For this end he calls a general assembly of all *Israel*, and, in a very moving speech to them, he proposes such considerations, as should engage them to be stedfast in the service of their God: for this, he runs over their great deliverances, and the miracles of kindness which God had wrought for them; he appeals to their own consciences, that God had been faithful to them in performing all that he had promised: and now, in our text, he puts the matter to their choice, and desires to know their resolution about it; but withal tells them, what he was resolved upon, for his own part, let them do what they would, *Chuse you this day whom ye will serve, &c.* There are three or four observations which are easy to be made from this text, and may be of general use.

1.) That

1.) That religion must be the matter of every one's own choice. *Chuse you whom ye will serve.* Joshua had done great things for Israel, he had led them over the river Jordan without bridge or boat; he had conquered a whole country for them, and driven out their enemies before them, he had divided their possessions among them, and settled them as a body politic; but, after all, Joshua could not make one soul of them truly religious; that must be the matter of their own choice: he could only advise them, and persuade them, and then leave it to themselves to chuse, whether they would serve the Lord or no.

Humane laws and penalties may affright men into an outward profession of religion; but that is the most they can do, for they cannot force the choice of the mind. It is quite out of their power to change and renew the soul. Your parents and your ministers cannot make you truly good; they can but instruct you, and advise you, and pray for you, and many times they pity you, and weep for you in secret; but the matter lies in your own choice, whether you will devote yourselves to God, or no.

Let none therefore build too much on a pious education, as if that would save them: let none expect too much from the prayers of others, whether parents, or ministers, or any other godly persons, as if these would procure them the favour of God, and a pass port into heaven; for after all, you must chuse for yourselves, and serve the Lord yourselves, or all that your best friends in the world can do for you will avail you nothing.

2.) There is a sufficient hint in our text for this farther observation, that most persons make a very
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ill and imprudent choice in this matter: *Chuse you whom you will serve, the gods which your fathers served, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell, or the living and true God.* Their fathers had served idols, and so did all their neighbours round about them; and *Josbua* was not a little jealous lest they should do so too.

Religion was never a general thing in the world since the fall of *Adam*. At the time of the flood there was but one godly family to be found any where; in all *Sodom* there was but one good man left; and, it should seem, that there was such a general defection from religion in *Josbua's* time, and even in *Israel*, that the good man was apprehensive, that he and his family might be left to serve the *Lord* by themselves. If we come down to the times of the gospel dispensation, whereby the spiritual kingdom of *God* in this world is greatly enlarged to what it was before; yet *Christ* calls his flock a *little flock*, and he says, that *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*, Matt. vii. 14. that is, few in comparison with the multitudes which go to destruction. There are few, but very few comparatively, who make *Josbua's* resolution and choice, that they will serve the *Lord*. Here the *world*, and the *flesh*, and the *Devil* have many more servants than *God*. "In chusing my religion then, I must not follow the multitude; in other matters, and things indifferent, I will not affect to be singular; but if I would go to *heaven*, I must differ in my religion from the greatest part of the world: nay in this, I may happen to stand alone, and not have one friend nor relation to bear me company; and for this I may become the jest of

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"all mine acquaintance: let it be so, saith *Joshua*,
 "yet I am resolved, that as *for me, and my house,*
 "*we will serve the Lord.*" Which brings me to
 a third observation.

3.) That whatever others do, and whatever choice they make, it is our duty, and our prudence to serve the *Lord*. In such a case as this, a wise man will determine to stand alone, and to go counter to the opinion and practice of a whole world. Thus *Joshua* resolved that he would do, supposing all *Israel* should revolt from *God*. And thus did the Prophet *Elijah*, in a time of general apostacy; when *Israel* had forsaken the covenant of their *God*, and thrown down his altars, and slain his prophets, *Elijah* was left, as he thought, alone, 1 *Kings* xix. 10. and yet this did not at all abate his zeal for his *God*: in such a case, it is much better to stand alone, and serve *God* by one's self, than perish with a multitude. Fashion, that models our garb and dress, should have nothing to do with our religion. Once more

4.) A good man will resolve and endeavour, that not only himself, but his family with him, may serve the *Lord*. *As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord*; he will serve the *Lord* alone, if none will join with him; but he earnestly desires, and will do all that he can, that others may serve him and glorify him too, and especially those who are of his own family. Thus, it is mentioned in the word of *God*, greatly to *Abraham's* honour, that he would use his best endeavours to promote religion in his house and family. *I know him*, saith *God*, *that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord*, *Gen.* xviii. 19. and it is recorded of *Cornelius*, and
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mentioned as an excellent instance of his piety, *that he feared God with all his house, and prayed to God alway*, Acts x. 2.

Masters, and heads of families, have, certainly, a trust committed to them from God, with respect to the souls of those who are put under their care: it can never be thought, that the care of their bodies should be so great a duty, as the Apostle represents it, 1 *Tim.* v. 6. so that to neglect it, is, in effect, to renounce christianity; and yet that the care of their souls, the nobler and immortal part, should be no duty at all. If he be *worse than an infidel*, who *careth* not, and *provideth* not for the bodies of his children and servants; what must he be? Worse than a brute sure! who does not care and provide, in the best manner he can, for their souls. We may suppose the great God and Judge of all questioning with such persons at the great day, as once he did with *Cain*, *Where is Abel thy brother?* Where are thy sons, and thy daughters, and thy servants, whom I did, by my providence, commit to thy care and charge? What care hast thou taken of their precious souls? Didst thou teach them and command them to keep the way of the *Lord*? Didst thou pray in thy house? and hast thou done what thou couldst to save the souls of all that dwelt under thy roof? These are serious questions; it greatly concerns all, who are parents and heads of families, to consider, now before hand, how they will answer them at the great day. But I must not stay upon this head at present. I am to direct my discourse chiefly to young persons; and I take it, that it will be very suitable to such a design, to enlarge upon the *third observation*, which I have raised from the text, *viz.* That whatever others do, and what-

ever choice others make, it is both our duty, and our prudence to serve the *Lord*.

Fashion and custom are, commonly, very weighty considerations with younger minds; and singularity is the abhorrence of the brisk and gay. "I shall be nothing but laughed at, says the young person, if I do not as other young people do of my age and condition; should I set up for preciseness and piety so soon, I must never shew my head among my companions any more." But who can think of this? what young person can bear to be made a jest of? as any young person may probably enough expect to be, who will dare to make *Joshua's* resolution, that let others do what they will, he will serve the *Lord*. Now to remove this prejudice against singular piety, and to shew the reasonableness and advantage, as well as the necessity of it, even to young persons, shall be the design of this discourse. And for this purpose I shall,

I. Consider *Joshua's* resolution and choice.

II. The reasons for it.

III. I shall make some practical improvement.

I. Let us consider, what it was that *Joshua* chose and resolved upon. It was, that he would *serve the Lord*. As for this phrase, to *serve the Lord*, I take it to comprehend in it the whole of religion; and several such general phrases are to be met with in scripture; as, *the knowledge of God*, and *the fear of God*, which are sometimes put for all that practical regard which creatures owe to *God*, or for the whole of what we call religion. It is most natural and easy to understand this phrase, in our text, in the same general and comprehensive sense: when *Joshua* declares that he was resolved to serve the *Lord*, he means no less, than that he was determined to be
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whatever God would have him be, and to do whatever God would have him do. Thus much, however, you may particularly observe from the phrase in our text, that true religion is not a mere name and profession only, but a real and practical business; 'tis *serving the Lord*, and we must make a business of it if ever we are accepted of God; for *not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*, says Christ, *but he that doth the will of my Father, which is in heaven*, Matt. vii. 21. Religion does not lie only in notion and opinion, but it is a service, which requires labour and diligence to perform it faithfully, and so as to obtain the master's approbation at last. Our blessed Saviour compares it, in one of his parables, to the work of a labourer in a vineyard; and elsewhere to the toils of a soldier in the wars. He tells us that we must *strive to enter in at the strait gate*, and that we must even *use violence* to get into the kingdom of heaven. Religion, then, according to the scripture account of it, is a *practical business*: 'tis the serving of God, which must undoubtedly imply these two things.

First, That those who resolve to serve God, must renounce and forsake all foreign service, which is contrary to God's service. And such is the service of the world, and of the flesh, and of the Devil. *Ye cannot serve two masters, God and Mammon*, says Christ, and *his servants ye are, to whom ye yield yourselves to obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness*, says the Apostle, Rom. vi. 16. it cannot be both, but it must be one, or the other. If we resolve, with Joshua, to serve the Lord; we must resolve, at the same time, that we will serve sin no more for ever; we must renounce

the *Devil* as our master, and the world as our portion, and the gratifying of our fleshly lusts as our chief interest. The language of such a resolution and choice must be, and will be, like that in *Isaiah* xxvi. 13. *O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.* “From this very moment I change my master, I will serve the *Devil* and the world no more: I am sorry that I have served them so much, and so long already: the time past is enough, and more than enough, (O! that it could be recalled again) for serving enemies, and following lying vanities, and withdrawing my allegiance from the blessed *God.*” Thus, when we first resolve for *God*, we solemnly recognise our baptismal engagements; we renounce the *Devil*, the world, and the flesh, and resolve, in the grace of *God*, that we will live after them no more. And then,

Secondly, Those that would serve the *Lord*, must devote themselves wholly to him, and must make it the aim and business of their lives to please and honour him. They must resign up their whole selves to his government, and all that they have and are to his sovereign and wise disposal. When the grace of *God* was first savingly at work upon *Paul*, his heart thus echoed to the divine call, *Lord what wilt thou have me to do?* “Is there any thing that I can do for *God*, any service which thou wilt please to accept from so vile and worthless a creature? *Lord* I am wholly thine; speak but thy will, and I will endeavour to do it all; let thy grace but assist me, and I will stick at nothing.” But now that we may serve *God* aright, in a practical obedience, these *two* things further must be taken

taken into the account, and must be strictly regarded by us. *First*, that we make God's word our rule; and *Secondly*, that we make his glory our end.

1.) We must make God's word our rule of obedience and duty. Lord, *what wilt thou have me to do?* His written word will inform us; for there he has been pleased to declare his will to us. This word of his must therefore be much consulted, and from thence all our measures of obedience are to be taken. It is not for us to cut out work for ourselves; but if we pretend to serve the Lord, we must do that work which he commands us. A servant may busy himself all the day, and yet do his master no service at all; nor will his master commend or reward him for doing his own pleasure, however hard he has toiled and laboured. Thus, in vain is all the labour we may take in religion, vain are all *pilgrimages*, and *penances*, and such like things, if we cannot prove, from the word of God, that this is the work which our Master has commanded us; for if he has not, he will reckon it no part of our service to him. We must make his word our rule. And

2.) We must make his glory our end. For since God *has made all things for himself, that they may shew forth his praise*, it is certain there can be no other way of serving God, but by endeavouring that this design may be accomplished, *viz.* that his glory may be advanced in all things. And so we are taught in scripture, to set up the glory of God as our end in constant view, to which all our actions must have some reference. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God, 1 Cor. x. 3.* Whosoever, therefore, resolves with himself to make the service of God his business, must at the

same time propose to himself the glory of God as his end : and this is the best and most direct way for us to aim at our own happiness and glory too. As for that notion of the schoolmen, and some other mystical divines of the last age, that we are to love and serve God merely for himself, and not at all for the hope and prospect of a reward, which, they say, is a mercenary temper and unbecoming a christian; or, that we are so to make God's glory our chief end, that if our damnation would more conduce to his glory, we ought to desire it, rather than to be saved. This is notion and language which the scripture knoweth not. *Moses*, we are there told, *had respect unto the recompence of reward*, Heb. xi. 26. and a greater than *Moses*, even the Lord Jesus Christ *endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before him*, Heb. xii. 2. And surely we need have no higher ambition, as to our obedience, than to be perfectly conformed to our Saviour. The case stands thus ; we make God our chief end, when we place our highest happiness in the enjoyment of him : we directly aim at his glory, when we endeavour that he may be honoured in our eternal salvation : but that is base and mercenary love, which prefers any thing to the favour and enjoyment of God ; as *Balaam* did, who *loved the wages of unrighteousness*, and would willingly have cursed the children and friends of God, to obtain *Balak's* reward. The sum of the matter, and of our duty then is this, that we sincerely intend and aim at God's glory in our own salvation. But it is time to dismiss this first head, which was to consider the matter of *Joshua's* choice, and what he resolved upon, viz. that *he would serve the Lord*. I proceed

II. To consider the reason of this his resolution and choice, which, it seems, he was so fixed in, as to be fully determined, that no example and practice of others should ever move him from it: in this, he would refer his judgment to no man, nor should the custom of the whole nation sway him one jot besides his purpose. Supposing all *Israel* should turn their backs on *God*, then *Joshua* was resolved to dissent from them all; *Choose you whom ye will serve, but as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.* This was no extravagant, nor very improbable supposition; for it has been actually the case of some good men to be alone in serving *God*, in times of general defection and apostacy, in the places where they dwelt. We mentioned the instance of good *Elijah* before; and to that we might add several others, as of *Noah* in the old world, of *Lot* in *Sodom*, and of *Daniel* in *Nebuchadnezzar's* court. Blessed be *God*, that this is not like to be altogether the case with any of us; we may (surely I hope we may) find some that will join with us in serving the *Lord*, and will be our companions in the way to *heaven*. Yet, *God* knows, but few such persons are to be met with any where. If we will, indeed, serve the *Lord*, and be in good earnest in religion, we must dissent from the greatest part of the world: and, very probably, we shall meet with considerable opposition, or at least, with many a reproach, and scoff, and jeer, from the multitude of ungodly men. Some young persons there are, who if they should venture to take up the resolution in our text, they would stand alone in their father's house and family; it might probably expose them to their parents frowns, and it would surely make them the jest of their brethren, and sisters, and the scorn of all their acquaintance.

We will suppose such a case; nay we will suppose, if you please, as much as *Joshua* supposes, that all the world were prophane and wicked around us; and then let us soberly consider, whether there would yet be good reason for us to resolve, as he did, that for our part we will serve the *Lord*.

It must be owned, that there are strong objections against it, at least such as appear so to younger minds; amongst which this is none of the least considerable, that it will make them appear so *odd* and *singular*, and will probably expose them to the derision and scorn of all their younger acquaintance. If *Joshua* will serve *God* alone, no doubt, but he will be laughed at for his pains; and so indeed may any person expect to be, especially any young person, who will dare to make *his* choice and resolve as *he* did: for serious godliness was never the fashion in any age, and serious christians have always been a sect that were spoken against. *Christ's* flock ever was but a little flock, and a despised part of the world; so that strict and serious godliness will, indeed, make a man appear somewhat odd, and singular in any age or country, and may very likely expose him to a good deal of contempt and scorn. Now this is peculiarly grating to young persons, and grievous to bear. *Joshua* was an old man, a matter of a hundred and ten years old, what cared he, what the world said or thought of him; but young persons must be more complaisant, and more conformable to the mode of the times. If strict religion was a general thing, well and good, then there would not be this objection against it; but as the case stands, to make one's self so singular and odd, to be pointed and laughed at, and, it may be, called a great many hard and ugly names too; who can endure it? This

This is the objection, which frights many young persons from making the resolution and choice that *Joshua* made. But let us now try the weight of it, in the ballance of sober reason; and I am persuaded we shall find it to be lighter than vanity. What is there in all this, that should, in reason, discourage any person from resolving for *God* and religion? Will it make one singular? it will be so much the more to one's honour: was any man ever ashamed of being singularly wise and learned? and why should we be ashamed of being singularly good and holy? are we ambitious of excelling others in human arts? and shall we be ashamed of serving *God* better than others, and of taking more care about our souls, than the carnal ungodly world do? besides, what signifies it to us what others do? for the time is coming, and will come very shortly, when we must all stand by ourselves; we must die by ourselves, and be judged by ourselves; and alas! it will be no comfort in *hell* to have companions in misery. "What then is this singularity which I am so much afraid of? Had not I better, ten thousand times better, go to *heaven* alone, than go to *hell* with a multitude? Resolve therefore, O my soul! without more delay, that let others, let all the world do what they will, thou wilt from henceforth serve the *Lord*." My friends, I would fain engage you to make this good resolution this day: believe it, it is a matter of infinite concern to you. Will you, at least, be persuaded to weigh the matter a little, and seriously consider but of these *two* things.

1.) That it is a most reasonable thing to serve the *Lord*; 'tis reasonable in itself, whether any men think it so, or no. The vote of the multitude, nay the opinion of the whole world cannot alter it; 'tis

reasonable, to be sure, most highly reasonable, that you should serve that *God* who made you, and who maintains you, *in whom you live, and move, and have your being*; and who has therefore an absolute and uncontrollable right to all that you have and are. When you yield yourselves to *God*, you can give him nothing but what was his own before; you only acknowledge his right, and bind yourselves, always to acknowledge it in your future behaviour; and what in the world can be more reasonable than this? Should I make any scruple of giving *God* his own, or of binding myself by the most sacred engagements to pay him that service which he had always a right to from me? Is it not most reasonable, that I should serve that *God* now, by whom I must be judged another day, and from whom I profess to expect all my happiness in a future world? The time is at hand, when those who now make a jest of all this, will certainly allow it to be reasonable, and will wish, with all their souls, that they had served the *Lord* too. The poor, unthinking, ungodly sinner, when he comes to lie upon a dying bed, and is startled with the near views of an approaching eternity, O how does he wish, that he had made it the business and care of his life to serve the *Lord*! Now he begins to see the folly of sin, and the wisdom of holiness; things which before he never thought of: “now (saith the surprised sinner) I
 “ find I have been cheated: dreadful deceit! the *De-*
 “ *vil* and the world have cheated me of my soul and
 “ its salvation. *Lord* what have I been doing all
 “ my days! had I been serving thee faithfully, I
 “ might now have been looking up with comfort.
 “ But alas, 'tis too late! I must have my portion
 “ with him whom I have served: O cursed mad-
 “ nefs!

“ nefs! had I but served *God*———but it is now
 “ too late, and I am undone for ever.” Judge
 now, while you are in health, and while the day for
 service lasts, whether it be not a reasonable thing to
 serve the *Lord*. The night is coming, death and
 judgment are hasting on; and is it not most reasona-
 ble to do that now, which you will certainly wish,
 ere long, that you had done? But, it may be, wish
 in vain, and bewail your neglect for ever. “ Let all
 “ the world say what they will then, let all my ac-
 “ quaintance and nearest relations serve the *Devil*,
 “ and the world, if they dare, and know no better;
 “ I shall pity them, and pray for them, but I will
 “ never join with them: as for my part I will serve
 “ the *Lord*.”

2.) As it is in itself most reasonable, so it is to us
 most necessary that we serve the *Lord*. It is neces-
 sary, for *God* requires it. He who made us, and
 maintains us, and will judge us another day, requires
 this service from us: and therefore, it is impossible
 we should please *God*, and obtain his favour, if we
 live in the neglect of it. And as it is necessary to
God's favour, so it is consequently necessary to our
 own happiness, that we make it the very business
 of our present life to serve the *Lord*. Let men say
 what they will, the word of *God* is plain and posi-
 tive about this matter, as that *without holiness no man*
shall see the Lord; and *that the slothful and unprofita-*
ble servant shall be cast into outer darkness. The com-
 mon pretence of slothful sinners is, that *God* is a
 very merciful *God*, who is not inclined to damn and
 destroy his own creatures; there needs not there-
 fore all this stir about religion and duty: let us but
 keep clear of murder, and adultery, and two or three
 other great sins, and no doubt, but all shall go well
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with us, and we need not be afraid that a merciful God will damn us eternally. But now Sirs, before you venture to presume so much on the uncovenanted mercy of God, will you hearken to what God himself saith about this matter? for certainly he best understands the exercise of his own mercy; do you say, or do any tell you, that there is no great harm in sin? But what says God? see *Rom. vi. 23. The wages of sin is death.* Do you take it, that it will be sufficient to keep clear of sowe grosser sins only? But what says God? see *James ii. 10. Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, i. e. knowingly and willingly allow himself in the least sin, is guilty of all,* and lies under the whole curse of the broken law of God. Do you presume on God's being a merciful God? Ay, but remember that he is a just God too, and has declared in his word, that he *will by no means clear the guilty*, *Exod. xxxiv. 7.* Are you sure there needs not so much stir about religion, and so much ado to get to heaven, as some people make? But what says God? *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling*, *Phil. ii. 12. Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able,* *Luke xiii. 24. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?* *1 Pet. iv. 18.* And now, which will you believe? on whose word will you venture your immortal souls? God's or man's. If God is to be believed, if his word may be credited, it is necessary, it is most absolutely necessary to your future salvation and happiness, that you make it the business of your present life to serve the Lord.

I will only add farther, under this head, that as the practical serving of God is necessary to your happiness,

happiness, so it is a sure and certain means of obtaining happiness: for *God* has established an infallible connection betwixt the duty which he requires, and the happiness which he promises. True practical religion is, certainly, a great means of happiness, even in this present imperfect life and world; so the Apostle *Paul*, and many others of the primitive christians found it, and could testify; as in 2 Cor. i. 12. *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.* And there is no rejoicing in the world like it; no feast so pleasant as a good conscience, and a heart filled and inflamed with a sense of divine love. Again, this service will ease a dying bed, and will probably fill the last hours of the saint, which are so terrible to nature, with great comfort and joy. The christian, that can look back from a dying bed on a life of devotedness and service to *God*, needs not be afraid of dying. He may very well encourage his soul against his natural fears, as an aged saint formerly is said to have done, when he lay a dying, and found in himself some fears, and some reluctancy to the awful separation; he heartened up his own soul with some such words as these. “Go forth, my soul, go forth, what art thou so much afraid of? thou hast been serving *Christ* these threescore and ten years, and art thou now afraid to go and meet him?” Above all, such a serving of *God*, as I have before described, is a sure way to *heaven*, and a certain means of eternal blessedness. Those that have been good and faithful servants here, shall assuredly enter into their master’s joy hereafter. *Christ*, who has purchased and prepared *heaven* for them, has promised it to them;

them; and he will shortly cleanse them from all their remaining imperfections, and *present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*. He will make them, and present them as worthy of his Father's presence and love, and worthy of seats and thrones in that everlasting kingdom of glory.

Thus I have considered the reasons for making such a resolution and choice as *Joshua* did, that let others do what they would, yet *he* would serve the *Lord*.

I would now, for an application of the whole, earnestly recommed this good resolution to all of you, and especially to young persons: I would not only propose it, but I would persuade and intreat them, that they would chuse the *Lord* for their *God*; and that before all other business, they would resolve to make it the business of their lives to serve the *Lord*.

Here I will take the liberty to speak particularly to two sorts of young persons.

First, To the children of wicked parents. The text very naturally hints an address to you, *Chuse you whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, &c.* If there are any of you whose fathers served the world and the flesh, and who lived without *God* in their families, without the worship and fear of *God*, but all they minded was making provision for the flesh, and heaping up wealth; am I speaking to any children of such parents? I can't speak of you, or to you, but with great compassion: I am sorry that you have missed so many advantages for religion and happiness, which others have enjoyed: you have missed of the great blessing of a pious education, whereby a foundation has been early laid in many a soul of everlasting blessedness. I pity you, for I am afraid that you will serve the same gods which your fathers served,
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and so be undone for ever. I fear that you have not those checks of conscience to restrain you from sin, which the children of holy parents more commonly have. You have been trained up in a woful neglect of *God* and your souls; and 'tis much to be feared, that your future lives will answer to your unhappy education; for most commonly it is so, but yet not always: as some of the children of godly parents prove wicked and vile, so there are some good children of wicked parents: as grace does not run in the blood, and come to any by inheritance, so neither is it absolutely prevented by the wickedness of ancestors. You are to chuse for yourselves, and if you chuse aright, then, whatever your parents were, you shall be accepted of *God*, and be happy for ever. Chuse you then for yourselves whom you will serve, whether the *world* and the *flesh*, which your fathers served, or that *God* who made you, and who only can make you happy for ever. Shall a family all perish from one generation to another? No, let there be, at least, one heir of *heaven* in your line. In this you should be ambitious to cross the strain, whatever opposition you may meet with from your nearest relations on that account: that honour and respect which is due even to your parents, must have no place here, so as to hinder you from resolving for *God* and *heaven*: father, and mother, and brethren, and sisters, must all be forsaken for *Christ* and salvation. O how happy would it be! might you be the instruments of saving the souls of any of your dear relations; however, do you resolve not to perish with them: if they will serve the *world* and the *flesh* still, and gratify the *Devil* still, do you be wise for yourselves, and bravely resolve that you will serve the *Lord*.

Secondly, I would speak a word also to the children of pious and holy parents. And I would address to them, and advise them in those words of Solomon, Prov. xxvii. 10. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.* Don't turn your backs on your own Creator, and your parent's God, nor strike hands with the grand enemy of your father's house. 'Tis often mentioned in scripture, as a mighty aggravation of men's sins, that *they forsook the God of their fathers*; and let me tell you; that you cannot sin and be wicked, at so cheap a rate as the children of ungodly men. You have been trained up in knowledge, and taught the good ways of the Lord, while they have been brought up in gross ignorance; you have had good examples set before you, while they have had very bad ones. I am persuaded that you feel many checks of conscience which others do not, and I don't much doubt, but the good Spirit of God has been striving with you, and awakening some early convictions in your minds; certainly you must be dreadfully hardened indeed, if you can be easy in sin, and live in the neglect of God and his service. Besides all this, you have many advantages for religion which others have not; how many prayers of your godly parents are now, as it were, on the file for you! many fervent and faithful prayers which they have put up for your souls, and for converting grace for you! you may go to God, and plead with him, his covenant with your parents, for you are not the children of strangers; you can call him your father's God; well, and will you not chuse him for your God too, and resolve to serve him, as your good parents have done before you? *your own friend, and your father's friend forsake not.* But I would not trespass too much

much on your time, and therefore I shall hasten to a close; only let me leave with you these two or three directions with respect to this matter. If you are, indeed, willing to make this happy choice and resolution which *Josbua* did; then

1.) Make it now. Chuse you *this day* whom you will serve. Now while you are young is, in many respects, your chusing time, and it is the fittest time of all to set out for *heaven*. Some of you, it may be, are now chusing your employments in life: others, perhaps, are now chusing their companions for life: but here is a greater and more important choice which you should make first of all, and that is, what *God* you will serve in life, and what portion you will have for ever. Now is the properest time for this choice, before you are entangled in the affairs of this world; and perhaps, it may be the only time: you are reckoning, I know, on many years to come; but it is very possible that you may be mistaken in your account, and these many years may not prove so many days, nor hours: or should life be prolonged, yet hereafter grace may be withdrawn and withholden from you, and then you will be lost beyond all remedy. It is certain that instances of old converts are very rare. The scripture speaks of it as a sort of impossible thing; or however, such a miracle of grace as is very seldom wrought, for an old sinner to become a new man, *Jer. xiii. 23. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.* Now is your time therefore to chuse your *God*, and make sure of *heaven*: if you would live comfortably, and die safely, and be happy for ever, chuse you *this day* whom you will serve.

2.) If you chuse to serve the *Lord*, chuse those
for

for your companions in life who will serve him with you. Shun the company of wicked persons, as much as may be, and let those be your companions here, with whom you would wish to live hereafter, and for ever. *Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men,* says David, *Psalms xxvi.* 9. It was well added by a good man, when he made that prayer his own, *for I never loved their company.*

3.) Resolve and endeavour with *Joshua*, in our text, that both you and your houses will serve the *Lord*. If *God* brings you into new family relations, you should endeavour that all in your families may be related to *God*. Set out with this fixed resolution, that your families shall be religious families, and your houses shall be *Bethels*, *i. e.* houses of *God*, where his worship shall be duly and daily performed in the family, as well as in the closet. In order to this, the choice of the nearest relation is of great moment: look to it, in the very first place, that you chuse such a one as will join with you in serving the *Lord*; for without this, there can be but little prospect of religion in your families; besides, how uncomfortable will it be for you to be joined with one for life, who will draw against you in the way to *heaven*? but when both the heads of a family make this resolution together with one heart, that they and their house will serve the *Lord*, then the work goes on with ease and pleasure: as in other business, so in religion, society and mutual encouragement will greatly facilitate the work, and promote the good success of it. Then may you hope for a blessing on your houses, for a blessing on your substance, and for a blessing on your souls. May the *Lord* bless you every one, and make you holy and happy from this time forth and for ever.

S E R.

S E R M O N V.

Early piety, peculiarly acceptable.

JEREMIAH ii. 2.

Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

THESE words were a message from God to the *Jews*, in which he upbraids them with their defection from him, after all the kindness which he had shewed them, and after their former expressions of love and duty to him. The time which they refer to, is plainly pointed out in the last clause of the verse; it was, when God led them through the wilderness, in their journey from *Egypt* to *Canaan*, and went before them in those visible tokens of his presence, a cloud, and a fiery pillar: when he fed them by miracles for forty years together, in a barren and desert place, *a land that was not sown*. Then the church of *Israel* was in its youth, having been lately incorporated by a solemn charter from *heaven*, and having newly received a body of laws from God at *Mount Sinai*; and this I take to be the time of their espousal to God, which
our

our text refers to. At that time, they were full of zeal and affection to *God*, and made large professions of love and obedience; this was *the kindness of their youth*. They sung his praise, but they soon forgot his works; so that there was now a great deal of room and reason to upbraid them with their defection and rebellion, after all that mutual kindness and love which *God* had expressed towards them, and which they had expressed towards *God*; as *God* doth by his Prophet here in our text. *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, &c.* I hope it will not be looked upon as a perverting of scripture, for me to accommodate this passage, (which has indeed a peculiar reference to the *Jews* and their circumstances) to the more general use of christians; as by applying the metaphor of *their espousal to God*, to the business of the sinner's closing with *Christ* by faith: and by applying that phrase, *the kindness of their youth*, to an early conversion. The *New Testament* will bear me out in such an application of this metaphor and allusion in the text; where that spiritual relation which is contracted betwixt the *Lord Jesus Christ*, and a sinner that is converted and believes on him, is represented by the marriage relation; and the sinner's closure with *Christ* by faith, is expressly stiled his espousal to him. *I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin unto Christ*, says the Apostle *Paul*, 2 Cor. xi. 2. The marriage relation is made, by the same Apostle, to be a type, or resemblance of the spiritual relation betwixt *Christ*, and his church, *Ephes. v. 32*. The church, in its holiest and happiest state, as it was represented to *John*, in a vision of the new *Jerusalem*, is called the *Bride, the Lamb's wife*, Rev. xxi. 9. This metaphor runs thro' the whole book
of

of *Canticles*, and is frequently to be met with in other parts of scripture.

Thus, you have the general design of my discourse from this text, which I shall divide into *four* parts.

I. To open to you the nature of the soul's espousal to *Christ*.

II. To consider the kindness and love which must and will accompany this transaction, and especially when it is done in youth; *The kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals.*

III. To shew you how the blessed *Jesus* does, and will *remember this kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals.*

IV. To make some practical application.

I. As for the nature of the soul's espousals to *Christ*. In the general, it is that sacred transaction betwixt the soul and *Christ*, upon which their mutual relation is founded; or, in consequence of which, there is a strict and everlasting league of friendship betwixt them, and they become in a manner united to one another. *Their beloved is theirs, and they are his.* It is the same thing as *conversion*, or *repentance unto life*, or *believing in*, or *receiving Christ Jesus*; or rather this one word *espousal*, takes in all those names, and all the several notions which are couched under them. When a sinner truly repents of his sins, and believes from his heart in the *Lord Jesus Christ*, and is converted and born again, then, and from that time he is espoused to *Christ*.

I am sensible that this metaphor ought to be treated, and discoursed on with a great deal of caution, least one should furnish occasion to some distempered fancies,

fancies, to turn this sacred allusion into jest and ridicule; and it may be also nauseate the sober and judicious christian. I shall chuse, therefore, in discoursing on this head, to mention only some few things, which are most plainly and certainly implied in the soul's espousal to *Christ*. As,

1.) The notion of an espousal implies, a near relation which is contracted betwixt *Christ* and the penitent believer. 'Tis an allusion to the nearest relation in this world, which yet, it seems, is not near enough fully to express the mutual relation betwixt *Christ* and his people; for that is expressed in scripture by stronger metaphors still, as by the union of the vine and the branches in the same tree, and by the relation of the head and the members in the same body. There is scarcely any relation among men, which implies in it any thing of tenderness and love; but it is made to lend a metaphor to represent the mutual relation betwixt *Christ* and believers. *Jesus* is their *Master* and *Lord*, they are his *servants*; *Jesus* is their *friend*, and he owns them for his *friends*, John xv. 15. *Jesus* is their *elder brother*, they are all the *younger children* of the same house; his *Father* is their *Father*, and his *God* is their *God*, John xx. 17. The *husband and wife* is the nearest relation of all among creatures, but the relation betwixt *Christ*, and those that believe on him, is nearer than all this: he carries the matter much higher than any of these metaphors will reach, when he says, *John* xiv. 20. *In that day ye shall know, that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you*. The Disciples themselves could not comprehend the meaning of this at present, nor would they be able to conceive how near this relation, and how intimate this union is, 'till they had received a much more

more plentiful effusion of the *Spirit* in that day which *Christ* there refers to. Thus much however we may conceive of the matter, that they are in him, as their surety and representative with *God*; and he is in them by the influence and indwelling of his *Spirit* in their souls: they are in him, and he is in them, by the strictest bonds of mutual friendship and love. How happy a thing then must it be, to be espoused to *Christ*! For a poor sinner to stand in so near and dear a relation to the son of *God*! Well may we stand with the Apostle and admire the *height, and depth, and length, and breadth, of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge*. His uniting himself to the human nature, whereby he became our brother, was the wonder of both worlds, of *heaven* and *earth* too: that was greater love and greater honour than he would ever vouchsafe to Angels; but his love to men would not rest here; as if this was not near enough, he takes every penitent believing sinner into the nearest possible relation, and admits all such into a most intimate union with himself. Well, this is the first, and one of the most obvious notions of a soul's espousals to *Christ*, that by this there is a near relation contracted betwixt them.

2.) The notion of an espousal further implies that this is by mutual consent. It should always be so in the espousals of fellow-creatures, for 'tis otherwise unnatural, and promises but little comfort: force and constraint should have no place here; it is certain they can have none in this spiritual espousal of the soul to *Christ*; this must be with free consent, or not at all. It is undoubtedly mere grace, and free grace in *Christ* to admit the espousal of poor sinful creatures to himself; it is purely out of choice

on his part, and so it must be on our part too, if ever we are espoused to a *Saviour*. Outward force may compel men into churches, but our own consent is necessary to our espousal to *Christ*. Our wills must consent to him, and our affections must embrace him and love him; we must become *his willing people*, and we must *chuse the way of truth*. Many are christians merely upon education; some are terrified with fears of *hell* and judgment, and call aloud upon a *Saviour* on their dying beds, Lord *Jesus have mercy on my soul!* but the soul that is espoused to *Christ*, acts upon nobler and freer principles than all this; he chuses the good part, as *Mary* did, and makes a voluntary surrender of himself to *Jesus*; he consents to his scepter, as well as his sacrifice: and in all this, he feels no other constraint but that of love, and is moved by no force but the evidence of truth. That power of *Christ* whereby sinners are made willing, puts no force upon the will, but rather sets it at liberty from the bondage which it was in before. Religion is altogether a voluntary thing; it does not come by inheritance, it does not run in the blood from parents to their children; it is never promoted by outward force, nor can it be instilled merely by education; 'tis a man's own voluntary act, and free choice, which espouses his soul to *Christ*: so that this espousal is by free and mutual consent.

3.) This consent is obtained by *sute*, as is commonly the case in the espousals of fellow-creatures. It is sued for on *Christ's* part; and when the sinner is once awakened to a feeling sense of his misery and ruin, he will earnestly sue for it too. It is no wonder at all, that a miserable creature should earnestly solicite the compassionate regard of a *Saviour*; but it

it is truly an astonishing wonder of grace, that the *Son of God* should even court the sinner's consent to be espoused to him, and made happy by him: and yet this he does, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden. Behold I stand at the door and knock! Come for all things are now ready.* He earnestly sues to poor perishing sinners, and intreats them to accept of mercy and salvation. He did so while he was on earth; and now he is gone to *heaven*, he sends his servants, as embassadors in his name, to intreat sinners to be reconciled to *God*.

4.) The notion of an espousal implies mutual love. It is very unhappy, and like to prove more so, when this is not the case in the espousals of fellow-creatures; but love can never be left out in the case of the soul's espousal to *Christ*. Love was the first spring of it on *Christ's* part, *I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee*, Jer. xxxi. 3. and *we love him because he first loved us*, 1 John iv. 19. And when he begins to manifest his antient, his everlasting love to a soul, i. e. as soon as it begins to operate in the sinner's conversion, it always kindles a reciprocal love to the blessed *Jesus*: the sacred flame quickly communicates from his heart to ours; 'tis impossible to believe on *Christ* and not to love him, *if any man love not the Lord Jesus, 'tis certain that he is none of his.* *My beloved*, is the constant language of the spouse in the *Canticles*, whenever, almost, she speaks of her *Saviour*. Love is the distinguishing grace of every true believer; and it is love like that of the espoused, which cannot admit of any partners to be the object of it, but it must be supremely and superlatively placed on one; such is the true convert's love to the *Lord Jesus*: and it must be constant and

perpetual love (the first love may be weakened, but it can never be quite destroyed) 'tis an immortal principle in the renewed soul, like the fire of the altar, which never goes out: *until the day break, and the shadows fly away*, when death shall be over, and the eternal light shall shine in upon the soul, this mutual love will still continue, and never expire.

5.) Espoused persons unite their interests, and must run all hazards together. They become mutual sharers in each others fortunes, and mutual partners in each others joys and sorrows. Here also the allusion holds strong and plain in the case of the soul's espousal to *Christ*; for hereupon their interest becomes his, and his becomes theirs. Renewed souls will naturally *care* for the things of *Christ*, and rejoice in all the good success of his interest and kingdom, even when it may, sometimes, seem to clash with their private worldly interest; as *John* the Baptist could rejoice in the views of *Christ*'s growing interest and honour, when he knew that his own private interest must decline to make way for it, *He must increase, but I must decrease; my joy is therefore fulfilled*, John iii. 29, 30. And *Christ* does, on the other hand, account of the interest of his people, as his own interest. Those words of rebuke to *Saul*, were yet words full of grace and tenderness to the Disciples, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* that is, my friends, and my brethren, the very members of my body, whose interest I account as my own. And to the same effect are those other words of his, *Matt. xxv. 40. In as much as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* *Christ*'s and his people's interest is one and the same; they have the same friends, and the same enemies, *the world hated me*, says *Christ*, *therefore it will*

will hate you; God is my Father and my God, therefore he is yours : and they shall ere long be happy together in the same place, and in the same kind of happiness and glory; the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, John xvii. 22. and they shall enter into their master's joy.

There is one circumstance, farther, in the case of espoused persons, which one can't but take notice of here, because the allusion is so plain and strong in the case of the soul's being espoused to *Christ*; which is, that upon the espousal, the husband becomes answerable for the wife, and stands charged in the law with whatever debts she may have contracted; and just so does the *Lord Jesus Christ* for all believing sinners. He becomes answerable for them, and for all that debt of guilt which they owe to the justice of *God*: justice now looks to him, and no longer to the poor indebted creature. He has espoused the sinner, and he must, and will answer for all; therefore *he was wounded for their transgressions, he was bruised for their iniquities, that the chastisement of their peace might be upon him, and that by his stripes they might be healed, Isaiah liii. 5.* The case of precontracted debt is very apt, amongst men, to cool a warm love, and to breed resentment instead of it; 'tis amazing grace in *Christ*, that when he knows our poverty and meanness, nay, when he knows how dreadfully indebted we are to the law and justice of *God*, yet he will espouse us to himself, yet he will even court and solícite our consent to become his. I will add only one thing more.

6.) That espousals are usually reckoned to be occasions of joy; but the soul's espousal to *Christ* is much more so. The conversion of a sinner, and the salvation of a soul, is the most joyful occasion

that ever happens in the world. The other espousals make a family or two joyful; but this diffuses joy and gladness through both worlds. When sinners lay hold on God's covenant, *God himself rejoices over them to do them good*, Jer. xxxii. 41. all the Angels in *heaven* rejoice when one sinner repenteth, *Luke* xv. 10. 'tis welcome news to them, when a lost creature is found, when a perishing sinner is saved, and another soul is added to God's family. Good men rejoice; how great is the joy of pious parents, especially, when they see their dear children, whom they had early devoted to *God*, and for whom they had so often wrestled with *God* in prayer; when they see them now become good and gracious! I take it, there is no joy of holy parents equal to this: a more joyful occasion could not happen to the father of the Prodigal, than when his lost son was found and restored to the family. Above all, the converted and espoused sinner himself, will have the greatest occasion of joy; 'tis the beginning of a new life in his soul, and a sure foundation of eternal happiness and glory: from henceforth he may go on his way rejoicing, he has an Almighty *God* for his *Father* and *Friend*; he is now become the special care of an indulgent providence; Angels will delight to minister to him, and all things shall be made to work together for his good. So that no occasion of joy can ever happen to any of us, like our being espoused to *Christ*. Thus much for the first general head, which was to open to you this metaphor, and the nature of the soul's espousal to *Christ*. I go on now,

II. To consider the kindness and love which must and will accompany this transaction, especially when it is done in youth. *The kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me*

in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Now some understand this kindness and love, which is spoke of in the text, of God's kindness and love to them; others, of their kindness and love to God. If we take it in the first sense, it was a matter of shameful reproach to them, that they should thus forget God's former kindness and love; and rebel against him, to whom they had been solemnly espoused: *they soon forgot his works*, how he had led them, as it were by the hand, in their weak and infant state; how he had by a series of miracles, brought them out of the house of *bondage*, protected them and fed them in the wilderness for forty years; how he did then enter into a covenant with them, and espoused them to himself. If we understand it in the latter sense, of their kindness and love to God, *when they sang his praise* for the wonderful deliverances which he had wrought for them, and made large professions of duty and love, as they did at *Sinai*; it was no less shameful, that they should now turn and rebel against God; and therefore he upbraids them, in our text, with their former professions of kindness and love; *I remember the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals*, though thou seemest now to have forgotten it. Perhaps both these senses are to be taken into the text, and God here reminds them of the mutual love and kindness, which there was formerly, betwixt him and them; and according to both these senses, we may accommodate this passage to the business of the soul's espousal to *Christ*, for in this there is mutual kindness and love.

First, On Christ's part. 'Tis most amazing kindness and most generous love in the *Lord Jesus Christ* to admit the espousal of a poor sinner to himself;

and not only to admit it, but even to sue for it, and to rejoice in it when the matter is accomplished; consider but our own unworthiness and poverty (for we are by nature wretched, and miserable, poor, and blind, and naked sinners) and how unsuitable is this match to the *Son of God*, the *Lord* of glory! how are our natures stained and blemished by sin! and our lives and practice have been full of rebellion: the *Image of God*, after which we were at first created, is withdrawn; the life of holiness is expired, and all the glory is departed from us: now *Christ* is well apprised of all this; and yet, will he sue for the sinner's espousal to himself? 'tis amazing kindness and generous love indeed. And as he is acquainted with all our former meanness and unworthiness, so he perfectly foresees how unkind and undutiful we are like to prove, even after our espousal to him. What poor, what undutiful returns does his love meet with, from his very saints and people, while they are in this world! and yet he courts the espousal and rejoices in it. Behold here the grace of our *Lord Jesus Christ*! how compassionate is his kindness! how generous and free is his love! Thus, there is kindness and love on *Christ's* part, and such as never was shewed to any other creatures, in any other world.

Secondly, Let us consider the kindness and love of this espousal, as it lies on the sinner's part. The kindness and love which accompanies this transaction, is reciprocal and mutual betwixt *Christ* and the penitent believer: 'tis vast kindness in him to admit it, to propose it, and even to sollicit the matter; and such is his condescending goodness, that he takes it very kindly when sinners consent to it: 'tis kindness to their own souls, and he accounts it as a
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kindness to himself too, when any poor sinners will accept of a *Saviour*; when they will consent to give him the opportunity of displaying the riches of his grace, and the powerful efficacy of his blood in redeeming and saving them; it is such a kindness as he will never forget. *I remember the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals.*

We shall apply this phrase, *the kindness of thy youth*, to an early conversion, and observe, that the *Lord Jesus Christ* takes it as the greatest kindness of all, when persons become espoused to him in their youth. He always shewed a particular regard and affection for young persons, while he was here on earth. *John*, who is presumed to be the youngest of the Apostles, was the greatest favourite of his *Lord*, of all the twelve. He kindly received even young children, which were brought to him that he might bless them; and rebuked his Disciples for offering to hinder it. We read, that when a certain young man came, and asked him a serious question, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Christ seemed to be overjoyed to find a young person so serious; and though he was not truly gracious, yet *Jesus* could not but regard him with a tender affection; *Jesus looked upon him and loved him*, Mark x. 21. And the Apostles copied after their *Lord's* example; thus, the Apostle *Paul* charges *Titus*, that he should apply his ministry to young people, in particular, and exhort them to be sober-minded, Tit. ii. 6. And the Apostle *John* says, that he rejoiced greatly to see children walking in the truth, 2 John, verse 4. The conversion of a sinner is always a joyful occasion; 'tis the best good news that can come from any corner of the world, that a soul is aspiring after God and heaven: but, especially, to see a young person nobly

nobly rising above the temptations of his years, and devoting the bloom and flower of his life to *God*, is a lovely sight ; and *Christ* takes it as a particular kindness, when any do consent to be espoused to him in their youth ; and that for several reasons. As,

1.) Because the love of young persons is generally the warmest and the most vigorous ; and so the love of *Christ* does ordinarily meet with the most sensible and grateful returns of love from young disciples. There is a certain warmth of affection, which is, in a manner, peculiar to our younger years, and which is capable of being nobly improved to the purposes of religion. It is common to hear aged christians complaining of the decay of their love to *Christ*, and of the languishing posture of their devout affections, which is indeed, many times, owing merely to the decays of nature ; their judgment is, perhaps, better settled in religion, their wills are more resolved for *God*, and their lusts and corruptions more subdued and mortified than when they were young ; but that vigorous warmth of the affections, which is, in a manner, peculiar to youth, and which was once nobly improved, in ardent love to *Christ*, and zeal for his interest, is now, in some measure, wore off with age ; and hence are all their complaints and fears. It is observable that *John*, the young disciple, as he was the greatest favourite of *Christ*, so he seems to have been the dearest and most zealous lover of *Christ* ; for when all the rest of the Disciples forsook him and fled ; and *Peter*, with all his resolution, denied and abjur'd him, *John* ventured to stand near the cross of *Jesus* : his love was strong as death, it inspired him with a zeal and courage which no dangers could daunt. Our affections are naturally most warm in our youth, and there -

therefore they are then best capable of being improved in the warmest divine love. The kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals to *Christ*, while we are young, is the most affectionate kindness and the warmest love; and therefore *Christ* sets a peculiar value upon it, and accounts it the greatest kindness, when sinners are espoused to him in their youth.

2.) The kindness of our youth is the greatest kindness to *Christ*, and so he accounts it, because we are then best capable of serving him. As our affections are the warmest, so our active powers are then most strong. Ancient people have enough to do, to grapple with the infirmities of their age, and to attend on the repairs of a decaying body; their time of usefulness in the world is almost over: our younger years are most suitable to business of any kind; and when the vigour and briskness of youth is join'd with a serious spirit, and season'd by the grace of *God*, it gives a person a vast capacity of usefulness and service to *Christ*. Such persons can lay out themselves a thousand ways to serve the interest of a *Redeemer*, which the aged and infirm are no longer capable of. And those that begin betimes are like to do the most eminent service. The servant who came to work in the vineyard at the *first* hour, did, to be sure, a great deal more than those who came in at the *tenth* or the *eleventh*. Late converts have time to do but little, and they usually move on but heavily and slowly in the ways of *God*: and therefore, the kindness of youth is peculiarly acceptable to *Christ*, because young converts are the most capable of serving his cause and interest. Again 3.) The singularity of this sort of kindness and love in youth, makes it the more valuable; there-
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fore *Christ* observes it, and remembers it, with a peculiar regard. The more rare and uncommon any thing is, the more it is priz'd and valued: now it is, certainly, no very common case for young persons to be espoused to *Christ*, but much otherwise; most young people give up the reins to their lusts, and live in a woful forgetfulness of their *Creator*, and neglect of the great work which they are sent into the world about. In childhood and youth there is little else to be found but vanity and sin: 'tis a lovely sight, therefore, to see here and there a young person separating himself from a crowd of sinners, bravely treading on the temptations of his years, and devoting the best of his life to God. *I remember the kindness of thy youth*, and the singularity of the thing makes it the more to be remembered, and the more highly to be esteem'd of. Every serious young person is an uncommon instance of sovereign distinguishing grace. Once more,

4.) The temptations and discouragements which often lie in the way of early piety, make it to be the more valuable. *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.* To follow God in the face of dangers, and to trust him in difficulties; is the most valuable obedience and the most honourable trust. God took it kindly, when they relied on his conduct and care in a wilderness of dangers, and could trust him for provisions in a land which produced no sustenance. So, it is peculiarly lovely and acceptable, when persons give themselves up to *Christ*, under circumstances of outward discouragement: when they surmount strong temptations and mighty oppositions in the way of duty, and make it evidently appear, that they

they prefer the *Redeemer's* interest, and the salvation of their souls, before any worldly interest whatever. And this is often, remarkably, the case of young convers. Youth is a time of great temptation, when the lusts of the flesh are most powerful, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life are very insnaring; young persons are more apt to be impressed and seduced by evil company, than others, whose riper years have gained them more experience: 'tis a brave sight, therefore, to see a young person resisting temptations, and nobly resolving for *Christ* and *heaven*. Again, it is no little discouragement in the way of many young persons, that serious godliness is so much out of fashion; it is looked upon as a piece of awkward singularity, by the young and gay part of the world. If a young person will give up himself to *Christ*, and walk close with *God*, he shall meet with many a discouraging shaft and jeer from his younger acquaintance and friends; this cannot but be grating and grievous: nay, it may so happen, that he must greatly disoblige his best friends, on whom he has his chief dependance for this world, if he will dare to follow conscience; now such circumstances as these, do very much enhance the kindness of an espousal to *Christ*. He accepts it as a double kindness, when any will be his on such discouraging terms, and under such discouraging circumstances. It is such kindness and love as he will be sure to remember, which brings me now to the third general head.

III. To shew you how the blessed *Jesus* does, and will remember this kindness of our youth, and this love of our espousals. If we love him betimes, he accepts this kindness, and will never forget it. As, 1.) He will remember our kindness and love to him,

him, so as never to alienate his love from us. *Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end,* John xiii. 1. And thus he loves, and will love, every true disciple, to the very end of life, and beyond it, for all eternity. When the heat and vigour of their affections may be weakened by age, and their capacities of usefulness to *Christ's* cause and interest may be, in a manner, ceased and gone; still he will remember the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals. *He will not cast them off when they are grown old, nor forsake them when their strength faileth:* He has promised; that *his loving kindness shall never depart from them.* That relation which is contracted by the soul's espousal to *Christ*, is the most lasting of all others: the nearest relation among fellow-creatures is, and can be but till death them does part; but the relation betwixt *Christ* and the espoused soul, is for ever and ever. *Neither life nor death can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord.* Rom. viii. 38. Thus, *Christ* will remember the kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals, by a constant and everlasting return of love.

2.) He will remember the kindness of our youth, with the largest and richest tokens of favour to our souls, in this life and world. He does, ordinarily, impart the greatest measures of grace and spiritual comfort, in this life, to such as have been espoused to him in their youth: and it follows, very much from the nature of things, that it should be so; for as it is in any wordly business, or art, such as begin young will commonly prove the most expert and skilful, so it is in religion; such as begin to serve God and *Christ* in their youth, and make him their friend betimes, usually grow the most expert in

in duty, and find the most of the comfort and sweetness of it: they are, ordinarily, favoured with the richest manifestations of divine love, and make the largest advances in grace, and are thereby suited to receive the weightiest crowns of glory. A late convert seldom finds much of the comfort of religion on this side *heaven*; he moves but heavily on in a work and business which he was never used to in his younger years: 'tis painful work to set about the mortification of old confirmed lusts, in the decline and weakness of age; and the remembrance of past sins, often imbitters the last days of the late penitent (for pardon of sin does not always blot out the bitter remembrance of it in this world.) Holy *Job* complains that *he was made to possess the iniquities of his youth*, *Job xiii. 26*. But now, an early conversion to God, and an early dedication to *Christ*, is the way to make life comfortable throughout; to make old age comfortable, and death comfortable. It may reasonably be expected, and it is commonly found, that *Christ* does distinguish such persons with the richest tokens of favour and love; they prove the most eminent saints, and the most comfortable and joyful christians, who were espoused to *Christ* in their youth. I add once more,

3.) *Christ* will remember the kindness of their youth to their advantage another day, and in another world. When he will remember every kindness that has been shewed to him, every cup of cold water that has been given to any of his Disciples; he will, doubtless, in a particular manner, remember the kindness of those who loved him in their youth: and if there be distinctions of thrones and mansions, if there be degrees of glory in *heaven*; it is reasonable to expect, that such as have honoured him

him most and longest shall then be most honoured : that he will particularly remember young disciples in distributing the crowns of glory ; and that those who have shewed the most kindness to him, by an early closure with him, and dedication of themselves to him, shall now be advanced the nearest to him, and behold most of his glory, and share the most of their *Master's* joy. Thus, will *Christ* remember the kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals to him. All that now remains is

IV. To make some practical improvement of this discourse. As

(I.) Does *Christ* remember the kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals ? then let us ask our own hearts, if we also remember it, and retain it. Supposing we are such, as have long since been espoused to *Christ*. Alas ! have we not left our first love, and forgotten the kindness of our youth ? that is what *Christ* charges upon some true disciples, *Rev. ii. 4.* And may not some of us charge it upon ourselves, that we have left our first love ? that we have not only lost somewhat of the heat and vigour of our affections, through the decays of age ; but that we are really grown more careless of duty, and less watchful against sin, and more carnal and worldly minded, and less conversant with *heaven*, by faith and hope, than we were formerly ? This is a matter which such christians, more especially, who are of an advanced age, and long standing in religion, should seriously inquire about. If *Christ* remembers the love of our espousals, and the kindness of our youth ; sure, it is a sad shame to us, if we forget it. *God* reproaches *Israel* with this, in our text ; and are there not some in our days to whom the same reproach belongs ?

longs? and to whom those words in the *fifth verse* also may, with but too much reason, be applied? *What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?* Let us recollect and remember the kindness of our youth, and the love of our espousals to *Christ*; and let us be humbled for our defections since, and endeavour to revive our first love.

2.) Let me exhort and persuade all my younger friends, more especially, upon what has been said, to become espoused to *Christ* now, in the days of their youth. You have heard something of what this means, how rich a blessing, and how glorious a privilege this contains; you have heard something of the advantage of it, and how *Christ* will remember it in your favour many ways: and now what say you, my friends, upon the whole matter? do you consent to be espoused to *Christ* or no? He is ready, He is willing, He earnestly sues for it; and now will not you give your consent too? and then the match is made; and you are made for ever. O how happy a beginning of the new year would this be, if this very day you would become espoused to *Christ*! You will then remember this day with gladness as long as you live; you will probably think of it with comfort when you are dying, and you will record it with adoring thankfulness in your eternal songs of praise above. This will make it the happiest year that ever you lived. Happy state indeed! to be reconciled to *God*, and to be the objects of his favour and love, to be the care of his indulgent providence, and to have all things working together for your good, *Happy is the people that is in such a case, yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord!*

Lord! What say you then, once more? this may perhaps be the last time that your consent shall ever be asked: are you now willing to be espoused to *Christ*? will you take him upon his own terms? if so, he will take you upon his own gracious proposals: and then this will be a day much to be remembred; *Christ* will remember this kindness of your youth, and will never forget the love of your espousals. But if you refuse, then know

3.) That he will remember the unkindness of your youth: and he will remember it against you as a grievous aggravation of your guilt another day, that he called and ye refused; he wooed you to be espoused to him, and ye would not. If *God* should give you grace to repent hereafter, yet then, the remembrance of his slighted mercy will certainly be very bitter to you: but if not, you will hear of this with terror another day, and in another world. O! how will you look *Christ* your judge in the face! With what face can you ask for his mercy then! How will you be confounded to remember, what you will not be able to forget, that once there was a time when *Christ* was wooing you to become his, and was offering to become yours, but you would not! And what must be the consequence of this? Why certainly it will be, that he who now woes you to be espoused to him, will then say to you, *I never knew you, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.*

Thus I have finished my discourse to you; all that I can do further, is to pray for a blessing upon it.
 “O blessed *Jesus*! whose grace alone can effectually win any soul to be espoused to thyself; follow thy word with thy powerful blessing, and make this to be a day of joy, in *heaven* and on earth,
 “over some sinner that repenteth.”

S E R.

S E R M O N VI.

Religious friendship; or, young persons directed in the choice of their companions.

P S A L M CXIX. 63.

*I am a companion of all them that fear thee,
and of them that keep thy precepts.*

ONE needs not consult the preceding verses, in order to settle the sense of our text, nor search the context to find the connection; for this *Psalms* consists, for the most part, of independent sentences: every verse, almost, is an intire proposition of itself, which neither wants, nor admits of any light from what goes before or follows it; only thus far there is a connection through the whole *Psalms*, that every part, and every verse of it suits the general design, which is a pious meditation on the excellency of *God's* law, and the happiness of those that keep it; and this is intermixed with sundry petitions suitable to such a subject. Here the *Psalmist* considers, and describes that sacred regard which a good man bears to the law of *God*; as it is variously expressed, by his loving it, meditating upon it, delighting in the study of it, and endeavouring,

vouring, with all his care, to keep it, and practise according to it. Again, in this *Psalms*, he views the law of God in different lights, as it many ways tends to make a man good and happy, both here and hereafter: it is a *lamp* to his feet, and a *light* to his paths, guiding lost sinners in the way to eternal blessedness: it affords a good man support and comfort in this pilgrimage state, and helps him to prepare for a future and eternal blessedness. So great was the pious *Psalmist's* love to the law of God, that he loved all who kept it, and chose such persons only for his companions and friends; as he declares in our text, *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

The right choice of companions and friends, especially of such as we make ourselves intimate, and familiar with, is, to be sure, a matter of great importance, both to the civil and religious life: and, I reckon, it is so, more especially, to young persons, who are apt to run into greater intimacies with their friends, and to make them more their confidants, than old people, who are usually, more cautious and wary. And besides younger minds are, generally speaking, more easily impressed, and more ready to receive a tang of the company they keep, than others, whose judgment and practice is more settled by long use and experience. It is a common saying, *You may know a man by his company*; because the company we keep, and associate much with, is very apt to form us into a likeness to them. Bad company is therefore extremely dangerous, according to that old observation of a heathen poet, which the Apostle *Paul* has adopted into one of his divine epistles, *Evil communications corrupt good manners*, 1 Cor. xv. 33. and it is more especially dangerous to
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young persons, who are the aptest of all others to be impressed and spoiled by them. On the other hand, there are great advantages to be reaped from good company. Such friends and associates in life, as the *Psalmist* speaks of in our text, even sober and religious persons, may be many ways a blessing to us, both with respect to our present and future welfare.

As I have intended this sermon chiefly for the benefit of young persons, I would hope, it may be a useful piece of service to them, to handle this subject; and to give them some directions about the choice of their companions.

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, says *David* in our text; he looked upon all such persons as his friends, and the companions of his pilgrimage: and no doubt but of such persons only were his intimate friend, and associates. He, elsewhere, absolutely declares against contracting friendship with wicked persons, or even admitting them to dwell, or so much as serve in his family, *Psalm* ci. 4, 6, 7. *A froward heart shall depart from me, I will not know a wicked person*, i. e. I will have nothing to say to him, nothing to do with him, *but mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me: He that walketh in a perfect way he shall serve me: he that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight: and if David would not take a wicked person for a servant, much less for a companion and bosom friend.*

I take it to be, in a manner, natural to us to contract more intimate friendship with some persons than others; and commonly with *one*, above all the rest, that we converse, or are acquainted with.

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ἄνθρωπος κοινωνικός, a sociable creature, was an ancient definition of man ; as if society was one main property and end of humane nature. *Adam*, though in *Paradise*, could not be thoroughly happy in his solitude, nor without a companion of the same nature with himself. And it is certain that many of the best ends of society, are not to be answered by a common acquaintance with many, without a more private and intimate friendship with some few, or some one in particular. 'Tis a common saying, that a crowd is not company ; we may be, in a manner, solitary, and lose the greatest benefits and comforts of society, in the midst of a large acquaintance : it has therefore been, in all ages, the common practice of most persons, and perhaps more universally the practice of young persons, to enter into private and more intimate leagues of friendship ; and to chuse out of their acquaintance some bosom friend and companion. *David*, though he was a King, and had no equal in the nation to make a bosom friend of, yet would he not be without such a privilege of friendship, but would rather admit a subject to be, in a manner, his equal in this matter ; he speaks of his own familiar friend in whom he trusted, Ps. xli. 9. and *Hushai* is called *King David's friend*, 2 Sam. xv. 37. So in the list of *Solomon's* courtiers and ministers of state, 1 Kings iv. at the beginning, one of them, viz. *Zabub the son of Nathan*, is said to be the *King's friend* : nay, and even our blessed *Saviour* himself, who for our sakes made himself poor, and had not so much as a house where to lay his head, yet would he not be without that great refreshment of an intimate friend : there was the *Disciple whom Jesus loved*. It looks as if *John* had a much greater intimacy with his *Lord* than any of the

the other Apostles, from *Peter's* beckoning to him, at the last supper, to ask *Christ* a question which none of the rest of them durst presume to ask him, *John* xiii. 24. I may conclude, therefore, that such a choice of intimate friends, and companions, is not only very lawful, but if the choice be well made, and rightly conducted, it may be highly beneficial to us: and I may venture to observe farther, that a man's welfare, and happiness, both as to this world, and the other, does, in a good measure, under God, depend on a right choice, and right use of those friends and companions with whom he does most familiarly converse. This is the sense of one of *Solomon's Proverbs*, chap. xiii. 20. *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* I shall make it the business of my present discourse, to advise, and direct you in this important affair of life. The method in which I shall proceed will be

I. To mark out the character of such persons, as we should make choice of for our friends and companions; and this I shall do from the text: they should, by all means, be such as *fear God and keep his precepts.*

II. I shall shew you how we should be the companions of such persons.

III. I shall shew you why we should make choice of such persons, and of such only, for our companions and friends.

I. We are to consider, what sort of persons we should make choice of for our friends and companions. And I would recommend to you such, as are described in our text, such as *David* made choice of for his companions, even such as *fear God and keep his precepts*; that is sober and good people, such

as are the friends of God, these will be, on all accounts, the best friends for us. This is a short description, and character of good people; they are here described by *two* marks, whereby they are distinguished from all the wicked and ungodly; they are such as *fear* God, and they are such as *keep his precepts*. The former part of this description, or character, respects the temper of their minds, and the principles which such persons go upon, *they fear* God: and the latter branch describes their behaviour and practice, *they keep* God's precepts; and both these together make up a compleat description and character of a good man.

First, He is one that fears God; that is, a man of a serious spirit, who has an awe of God upon his mind and conscience, and is truly concerned to please him, to escape his wrath, and to obtain his love. This word *fear* comes under very different acceptations in scripture; sometimes it signifies a particular passion in the mind of man, and then it is either good or bad, according to the objects and occasions of it. There is a slavish and sinful fear, and there is a holy and child-like fear: there is a carnal fear, which is very dangerous to the soul; and there is a religious fear which is very necessary to our salvation. This same word *fear* is also used in a more large and general sense, for the whole frame and temper of the mind of man: thus *the fear of* God signifies the same thing as a serious spirit, or a holy and religious turn of mind; as when we are bid to *be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*, Prov. xxiii. 17. or when we are exhorted by the Apostle, to *be perfecting holiness in the fear of* God, 2 Cor. vii. 1. that is, to maintain a serious spirit, a holy and devout frame of mind, to eye God
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in all we do, to be impressed with a sense of his authority over us, and his presence with us; and so to make it our very business to honour and to serve him, and to obtain his favour. Thus the fear of God is directly opposite to a vain mind, which is regardless of God, and thoughtless and careless about the great and important matters of religion and a future world. Religion is a very serious, as well as a very important thing; a vain and frothy spirit will by no means suit with it: if ever we lay religion to heart, in good earnest, and to good purpose, it will certainly make us thoughtful and serious; it will possess the mind with a holy awe of God, and concern about eternity. All this is very fitly expressed by this one word, *fear*; and so it signifies the same thing as a religious spirit and frame of mind.

Secondly, Truly good persons are also described by their holy practice; which is another essential part of their character, *they keep God's precepts*: their hearts, and their lives, their principles, and their practice are of a piece, and correspond with one another. As they are serious in their thoughts, so they are sober in their lives; as they fear God in their hearts, so they obey him in their practice: to be sure it must be so; a real principle of holiness in the heart will necessarily respire in the life, and manifest itself in a holy conversation. Our blessed Saviour has laid this down as the most certain rule we can judge of men by, *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit: wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them*, Matt. vii. 18, 20. and the Apostle James proposes it as the truest way of our evidencing the reality of inward religion to others, and of justifying our pretensions to faith and piety, viz. by our good works, James ii. 18. *A man may say, thou hast faith and I have works:*

shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Not but that there may be a good deal of morality, separate from true piety. The *Pharisees* of old, are compared by *Christ* to whitened *sepulchres*, which were beautiful without, and yet full of rottenness within; that is, their lives were outwardly adorned with moral virtues, but their hearts were very corrupt and wicked: and therefore the mere practice of morality, is by no means sufficient for us to judge of our own state by: but we must examine more closely, into the temper and frame of our souls, as well as into the practice of our lives, in order to make a good judgment of ourselves, and to know whether we are in a natural or in a regenerate state. But as to other persons, we cannot look into their hearts, we can be no judges of their inward principles; and therefore the only way we have to judge, is by what appears outwardly in their lives and conversations; and we ought in charity to conclude, that where the life is good, the heart is so too. If a man keeps *God's* precepts, we should hope and believe, that he is one who truly fears *God*. Upon the whole, this is the best description of a good person that we can pretend to judge of any by, he is one *that fears God and keeps his precepts*, that is, one who discovers a serious spirit, and is sober and good in his life and conversation. Thus we are directed, by our text, what sort of persons we should make choice of for our companions and friends; that is, as far as we can judge by what appears outwardly (and further than so we cannot judge at all) we should chuse those for our friends, who are the friends of *God*; and associate ourselves with such persons in this world, as we would wish, and hope to be joined with eternally in the other world. I come now

II. To show you how we should be the companions of such persons; as *David* says that he was a companion of all them that feared God: which implies two things; first, that he was like them, being himself of the same character, a man that feared God. And secondly, that he did associate himself with such persons, and such only.

First, To be a companion of them that fear God, is to be like such persons, and to be of the same character. In this sense, *Job* says, that he was a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls, *Job. xxx. 29.* meaning, not that he associated with them, but that being forsaken by his friends, he lived a solitary life, as those creatures do, and was even shunned, and abhorred as those creatures are. In the same sense, the Apostle *John*, writing to the seven churches in *Asia*, styles himself their brother and companion in tribulation, *Rev. i. 9.* Though he was, at that time, banished to the isle of *Patmos*, and far separated from the society of those christians; yet still he was their companion, as he was of the same character with them, and suffered much such like things as they did. Thus, all good people, every where, are companions and friends, and brethren; they are all united in the same head, are expectants of the same hope, and heirs of the same heavenly inheritance: they are all professors of the same faith, are followers of the same *Jesus*, and are all embarked in the same cause and interest: and thus, on many accounts, they may all, very properly, be called companions. And it is certain that we must, in this sense, be the companions of them that fear God, before we can associate with such persons to any valuable purpose. *Can two walk together except they be agreed? And what communion hath light with darkness?* Otherwise, we should not relish

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their company, nor would they admit us into their society and friendship; therefore the foundation of all our valuable, and comfortable communion, with the saints and people of *God*, must be laid in our likeness to them, or in our partaking with them of the same divine nature; if we would chuse good people for our companions, we must be good ourselves. And upon this

Secondly, To be a companion of those that fear *God*, is to associate with them: and that we should do in *two* respects, *first*, by maintaining a religious converse, and joining ourselves with such persons in their sacred societies. And *secondly*, by making choice of such persons for our more intimate companions, and bosom friends.

1.) We should cultivate and maintain a religious converse with good people, and join ourselves to their sacred societies: to which purpose is that exhortation of the Apostle's, *Heb. x. 25. Not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.* The communion of saints in this word, is to be maintained by their mutual converse, and by their joining together in the same acts of religious worship; both which are probably implied in *their speaking often one to another*, which is said to be the practice of *those that fear the Lord, Mal. iii. 16.* that is, they associate much together, they delight in one anothers company, and often meet for religious purposes: this is but the natural effect of their likeness to one another, and of their agreement in the same principles, and interests, and hopes. Rakes and debauchees love one anothers company, and they like to associate together, mutually to inflame one anothers lusts; so, it is as natural for good people to associate together, and to delight in each others company. Persons who are so much of the same turn of mind,
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and practice of life, must needs be agreeable to one another. And as this is natural to all, so it may be very useful to every saint; for christian conversation has certainly a great tendency to christian improvement: that speech which is *savoury* and *good*, is greatly *for the use of edifying*; as, to enlighten the mind, to warm the heart, to interrupt our carnal worldly thoughts, and inspire the soul with new life and vigour. The hermit in his cell, who is always alone, misses a thousand opportunities and advantages of divine improvement, which other christians enjoy in their conversing together; and therefore the monastic life, which the *Papists* do so much applaud, is by no means friendly to religion: methinks, it does not look at all like an institution of *Christ*; but it rather seems to be a contrivance of the *Devil*, to hinder christians of some of the greatest advantages for their spiritual improvement. But when I speak thus of christians conversing together, I mean it, of their conversing about religious matters; and so, no doubt, does the Prophet mean, in that forecited place, *They that feared the Lord spake often one to another*, it is not to be supposed, that he speaks of their common discourse about worldly matters, in which there is nothing peculiar in their conversation, from that of worldly men, but of their speaking to one another about the things of *God*: as of the wonders of his mercy and love, their experience of his grace, and the matters of their common salvation. Such christian society, is found, upon large experience, to be a most excellent means of divine improvement, and spiritual growth. And thus, therefore, we should make those that fear the *Lord* our companions, *viz.* by cultivating and maintaining a religious converse with them.

And further, we should join ourselves to their religious societies. Having given up ourselves to *Christ*, we ought to give in our names to some church of *Christ*; that we may join and partake with his saints of all the provisions of his house, and all the ordinances of his gospel. We should join with them in prayers, and praises to *God* and our *Redeemer*, in hearing his word, and in commemorating the death of *Christ* at his table. This is the very thing which *Christ* advises the inquiring penitent to, *Cant.* i. 7, 8. in the former of those verses, the devout soul is brought in, as inquiring after *Christ*, where she might meet with his presence, and the tokens of his love. *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon? For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?* The following words are *Christ*'s answer, directing the pious soul where to meet with him, and enjoy his presence, *If you know not, go thy ways forth by the footsteps of the flock; and feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents.* That is, join thyself to those flocks of the companions; there thou shalt find me, and meet with my presence and love. This is, most certainly, the duty of all that fear *God*, to associate with and join themselves to the societies of his saints and people.

2.) We should make choice of such persons, as fear the *Lord*, for our more intimate companions and bosom friends. For beside that universal benevolence, and hearty good will which we should bear to all men, and especially to all that fear *God*; it is certainly both very lawful, and may, in some cases, be very useful, to contract a more intimate friendship with some few persons, or with some one person above all others. As in *Christ*'s own family
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of the twelve Apostles, where they were all friends; except one, both to *Christ*, and to one another; yet, it is plain, there were also private friendships among them; and *Christ* himself, though he calls them all his friends, was more intimate with some, than with others of them. *Peter*, and *James*, and *John*, seem to have intimate bosom friends: we often find these *three* together, and *Jesus* seems to have been more intimate with those *three*, than with any of the rest of the Apostles; we read of his taking those *three* with him to several places, and on several occasions, where the rest were not admitted; as when he was transfigured on the mountain, when he restored *Jairus's* dead daughter to life, *he suffered no man to follow him into the chamber, but Peter, and James, and John*, and, so also, when he was in his agony in the garden. These were his intimate friends among the Apostles, to whom he would more freely unbosom himself, than to any others of the twelve. And even of these three, *John* had the preference; he was *the Disciple whom Jesus loved*. It was but a natural thing, for the man *Christ Jesus* to have his intimate and bosom friends: and so it is to men in general.

Now it is a matter of vast consequence, that we make a right choice of our bosom friends; and, perhaps, it is more so to young persons, than to others, because they are most apt to be influenced by their companions, and are now in that part of life, in which, in all likelihood, they will be either made or ruined for ever. The right choice, in this case, is certainly to make those our companions who fear the *Lord*. And this is what I would now earnestly recommend to young persons; and I shall endeavour to give you sufficient reasons why you should, by all means, chuse such persons, and such only for your intimates and bosom friends.

III. This is the third general head of discourse, which I laid down; *viz.* to consider the reasons of such a choice. And you may take these that follow.

First, Because these are *God's* friends, and therefore we should chuse them for our friends. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not*, is the wise advice of *Solomon*, Prov. xxvii. 10. Would you not respect one who had been your father's friend, and whom your parents valued and loved? And how much more, should you love and value the friends of *God*, your heavenly *Father*, who made you and maintains you. Besides, these persons are the most excellent of the earth, in his account, who best knows the true worth and value of all men; they are such, says *God*, of whom the world is not worthy. *God's* people are the most nobly born, and most nobly related of any in all the world; for they are the children of *God*, the heirs of *heaven*, the spouse and the members of *Christ*: whereas wicked persons are all *fools*; so they are branded in scripture; fools indeed! who are enemies to *God*, and slaves to the *Devil*, and who make nothing of damning their own souls. And now, can it be any doubt with you, which of these two sort of persons, you should chuse for your friends and intimates? O! by all means, let *God's* friends be mine, and let my intimacy be with those who have an interest with *God*; with those who will bear me upon their hearts at the throne of grace, and who may probably prevail with their heavenly *Friend* and *Father*, to bless their friend on earth. *Job's* friends found the mighty advantage of having such a friend to speak for them, who had an interest with *God*, and who could obtain a pardon and a blessing for them, even when *God* was angry with them, and would not admit them

them to speak for themselves. Thus, their being God's friends, is a very substantial reason why we should chuse good people for our friends and companions.

Secondly, These are the companions and friends who, of all others, will be most useful and comfortable to you. They are, in themselves, the most excellent persons, and will be to you, on all accounts, the most valuable and useful friends, *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise himself*; their example, and discourse, their advice and counsel will have a mighty influence in forming younger minds, especially, into sobriety, and goodness; by conversing with such persons, they are sweetly allured to virtue, and insensibly drawn to religion: but what good can be learned, or got by wicked companions? they will be most likely to lead you into the way of ruin; for *the best of them*, says the Prophet, *is as a brier, or a thorn hedge*, Micah vii. 4. which will tear and wound us, that is, deprive us of our innocence, wound our consciences, increase our guilt, and thereby dreadfully inflame the reckoning of the great day; all this is but the natural effect of keeping company with wicked persons.

Again, Good people will be the most comfortable friends that you can make choice of, for they will be faithful to you, and you may safely trust them; but you must never depend on wicked persons being faithful to you, who are so unfaithful to God, their greatest benefactor, and the best friend of all. If conscience does not bind the friendship, it is little to be depended on; such as fear not God, will not regard man neither, any farther than as it suits with their humour and interest: you can never be safe, therefore, in unburdening your minds of your secret griefs to any ungodly person, for you can have

have no security that he will not afterwards expose you, and betray your secret. Wicked persons are not to be trusted, and therefore are not fit to be made bosom friends. Further, you must not expect that they will stand by you in a time of distress and trouble; but 'tis much more likely, that when they have brought you to ruin, then they will leave you. Let the instance of the young Prodigal, in the parable, be a caution against ever depending on the friendship of ungodly men: while he was in his prosperity, no doubt but his companions, who were wicked like himself, would profess a world of friendship and love to him; but when his substance was once gone, and he began to be in want, his old companions and friends were all gone too; they had brought the poor young man to ruin, and there they leave him to shift for himself: methinks we hear him exclaiming against them now in his distress. "Where are my old companions now on whom I spent my estate? my friends who cared for me so much, and pretended such a world of love? is it all come to this? not one of them will look on me now, or so much as give me a meal's meat! fool that I was, to hearken to their counsel, and leave my father's house!" Such is the friendship of wicked persons; and this is all the comfort you must expect from such friends, in a time of distress and trouble. Or, suppose the best, that they should not forsake you, yet, alas! what comfort can they minister to you? would you ever think of going to such persons for advice under trouble of conscience, suppose the terrors of God should set themselves in array against you? or what comfort can they bring you on a dying bed? would it then be any pleasure to see your wicked companions standing around you? would you not rather
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abhor the very sight of them, who have tempted you to sin, and helped you to ruin your souls? What can these friends do for you, when you come to stand at the judgment seat of *Christ*? Alas! they will be dreadful witnesses against you there: or, do you think it will be any comfort to you in *hell*, to have your old companions with you in that place of torment? No, the rich man in *hell* was dreadfully afraid of his wicked brethrens coming there too, lest the very sight of them should enrage the accusations of his conscience, and their bitter reproaches should aggravate his torment. Thus you may easily compute, before hand, that no true comfort is ever to be expected from wicked companions. But, on the other hand, if you associate with good people, and make those your companions who fear the Lord, you will find, they will be comfortable to you on many accounts. It will be no small comfort, at present, to have such friends in whom you may securely trust, to whom you can freely open your minds, and communicate your most secret griefs and troubles, and with whom you can take sweet counsel and pray together; *As ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend*, Prov. xxvii. 9. These can comfort you in your spiritual troubles, and these will not forsake you in your temporal afflictions; such friends as these will be very welcome to your dying bed; you will be glad to see them then, and it will be comfortable taking leave of those in this world, whom you have good hopes of meeting again in *heaven*. It is certain, the communion of saints is one of the sweetest comforts that we are capable of on this side eternity; and it will be no little part of the happiness of *heaven* itself, that we shall there converse with the *Spirits of just men made perfect*. I add only one reason

son more, why you should chuse such as fear God for your friends and companions now. And that is

Thirdly, Because these are the persons that you would wish and desire to be with for ever. I appeal to you all if it be not so: do not you desire to be with good people in the other world? to *die the death of the righteous*; to be numbred with the friends of God, and to have your lot and portion with them in *heaven*? I am confident, this is what you all wish for; and who are so proper to be your companions in this world, as those whom you desire to be with for ever? Ay, and you may depend upon it, that you will not be found fit for their company, nor will you be admitted into their society above, if you are not the companions of those that fear God here below: a *companion of fools shall be destroyed*. You may, therefore, make a shrewd guess, at least, what company you shall be sorted with in the other world, by what company you like best to sort with here. Now, how right and proper is it, to make those your companions in this life, with whom you hope to live eternally! when you chuse such as fear God, for your acquaintance, and friends, 'tis forming an acquaintance and friendship for *heaven*; nor can I doubt, but that such of God's people as have conversed, and taken sweet counsel together in this their state of mortality, will have some peculiar pleasure in their meeting in that other world. The Apostle Paul reckoned on a peculiar joy, in meeting his *Thessalonian* christian friends on the other side death, and that he should be able to know them, and single them out in the vast assembly at the great day. *What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?* 1 Thes. ii. 19. So that when you contract an acquaintance
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and intimacy with the friends of *God*, and are such yourselves, you form an acquaintance for *heaven*: And, I am persuaded, there will be a peculiar pleasure in meeting such acquaintance there. By all means then, make those your friends and companions now, who are going to that better world, and they are such *as fear the Lord, and keep his precepts*.

Thus, I have gone through with the heads of discourse which I proposed from this text. The subject has been chiefly practical, and therefore I have now little more to add by way of application. I will only leave with you *two or three* hints before I close.

1.) Let what you have heard, concerning the choice of good companions, be a caution to you, to avoid all evil company. You have, in some measure, heard of what great advantage it will be to you, to make those your companions who fear the *Lord*; but it is impossible to say how mischievous evil company may probably be to you; for a wicked man is certainly the most dangerous of all creatures: and so much, some suppose, is taught in the law of *Moses*, where he who touched a dead beast, was to be unclean but until the evening, *Levit. xi. 24.* whereas he who touched a dead man, was unclean for seven days, *Num. xix. 11.* intimating, perhaps, that the pollution which is contracted from bad men (such as are said in scripture to be dead in sin) is the foulest and worst of all. You should therefore avoid their company as much as possible, fly it as you would the plague. It is not possible, indeed, that any of us should wholly avoid the conversation of evil men, while we dwell in this evil world, which is so full of them; but what I mean, and would earnestly advise you to is this, that you would not make wicked persons your intimate and bosom

bosom friends; converse with them no more than needs must, and if you have already contracted an intimacy with any such persons, break it off in time, and take up *David's* resolution, *Psalms* cxix. 115. *Depart from me ye evil doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God.* "In the grace of God
 "I am now resolved for *heaven*, and the friends of
 "God shall therefore be my friends and my compa-
 "nions; depart from me ye evil doers, for I will
 "have no such company: I dare not venture my
 "soul at your ungodly rate, I would not have my
 "lot with you for ten thousand worlds; it is time
 "therefore for you and I to part. We must be
 "parted eternally, and its no matter how soon."
 But,

2.) Supposing you are so happy as to have religious friends and intimates, I would then offer a few words of advice, in order to the improving your friendship to the best purposes. As,

That you would be very free and open with each other about your spiritual concerns; endeavour to get into as great a freedom in discoursing about spiritual, as about temporal matters. It was the practice of some christians in the primitive times, which they found a great advantage in, to enter into very strict leagues of friendship one with another, merely on spiritual accounts; each man had his bosom friend, to whom he would speak freely about his spiritual concerns, and open to him all his heart: and they used, in a most solemn manner, to charge each other with the care of one another's souls; obliging themselves mutually to watch over one another; and to do all they could to promote one another's salvation. Was something of this sort more aimed at in your private leagues of friendship, it would certainly turn to a valuable account.

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Further, Let me advise you to be faithful in keeping one another's secrets; and also in reproving one another's faults: all flattery must be utterly banished out of true and profitable friendship, and you must settle it with yourselves, as an unalterable term of your mutual friendship, that you will neither suffer any fault in each other to pass without reproof, nor ever take offence at each other, for faithful reproving.

And in the last place, Let me advise you, to cultivate and improve your friendship by prayer; which will both be a very great security of its continuance, and an excellent means of making it truly profitable. Always make conscience of remembring one another at the throne of grace; and never speak to *God* for yourselves, without speaking for your friend too: and I would further advise you to pray often together, to pray with, as well as, for one another; join your interest at the throne of grace, for when two or three meet together there a special blessing is promised them; and there you may pour out your souls to *God* with much freedom, and without any restraint from natural bashfulness, when there is none present to hear you, and join with you, but your intimate bosom friend: such a use of your friendship will confirm and indear it, and make it a happy means of preparing your souls for a better world, where all is friendship and love.

3.) After all that I have been saying about humane friendship, let me, above all, advise you to make *God* and *Christ* your friends. Humane friendship is, at best, but a fickle and precarious thing; there is a great deal of weakness, and a great deal of unmortified passion, in the best and holiest on this side *heaven*; which often imbitters the sweetest friendship, and sometimes quite dissolves it. Depend not too much, therefore, on the friendship of any

136 Religious friendship; &c.

any man; remember that *Paul* and *Barabas*, though they were good men, and dear companions, yet they fell out to a parting; the like may happen betwixt you and your dearest friends on earth. But *God* is a constant and steady friend; no misunderstanding, no malice of enemies, no change of outward condition, can ever alienate his love from you, and break off your friendship with him. His friendship alone can make you happy, and it will make it but a light matter how your earthly friends prove to you. Seek *God's* friendship, therefore, above all; make sure of reconciliation with him, through *Christ*, the *Mediator*, for none but *Christ* can make up the difference which sin has occasioned betwixt *God* and you; fly to *Jesus Christ*, by faith in his blood, and beg of him to be your *Mediator* and *Peace-Maker* with the *Father*; give up yourselves to him, and trust your souls with him, to be justified by his righteousness, and to be sanctified, and ruled by his word and spirit, and so shall you be sure to have the *Father* and *Christ* for your friends for ever; your friends in life, your friends at death, when all other friendships fail, and your friends and portion to all eternity. O! that you would thus begin this new year with a hearty resolution for religion, and with an unfeigned surrender of yourselves to *God* in *Christ*; and so will you be secured of that friendship which will not only make this a happy year to you, but which will secure your happiness in another world, when days, and years, and time are no more.

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